

Inclusive Interpretive Materials Guidelines

Background

The State Coastal Conservancy's mission is to protect and restore, and increase public access to, California's coast and the San Francisco Bay Area. The Conservancy funds signage and interpretive materials (for example: digital content, printed materials, physical exhibit, and sign panel) for public access projects. These materials typically recognize the historical and environmental significance of an outdoor space and can open the door to inclusivity by sharing elements of history that are not often told. We recognize that the history of injustice, exclusion, displacement and extractive processes towards California's Native Americans, Black people, people of color, immigrants and other historically excluded communities¹ has led to the suppression of their representation and perspectives in stories of the California coast.

Following the Conservancy's "[JEDI Guidelines Appendix A: State Coastal Conservancy JEDI Guidelines in Action](#)," and recommendations from the Atlantic article, "[Five Ways to Make the Outdoors More Inclusive](#)," we provide the following guidance for creating interpretive materials that include and honor stories from historically underrepresented communities. Through interpretive materials, we can reinforce the message that all visitors and their safe uses of outdoor spaces are welcome and respected and that the full story of the California coast comes from multifold perspectives.

Overarching Guidelines for Creating Inclusive Interpretive Signage:

1. Challenge the dominant narrative: move away from the colonial perspective of history, and the white/white male dominant narrative of the outdoors.
2. Avoid deficit framing. Deficit framing is defining people by a problem, negative incident, or by negative experiences, which can reinforce negative stereotypes. Example: "At-risk youth" vs. "Youth who must overcome challenges".
3. Collaborate and acknowledge the people who are the subject of the material. This should include living descendants of historical people/groups being described. Give them decision making power and compensate them for their time.
4. Be as transparent as possible about what your expectations and requirements are, and who has the final editorial say on the signage.
5. Be creative about messaging that could encourage understanding and inclusivity of underrepresented communities!

¹ "Historically excluded communities" in this document refers to groups of people whose perspectives and histories have largely been ignored or overshadowed by the dominant colonial, cisgender, white, male perspective. Underrepresented communities include, but are not limited to, California's Native Americans, Black people, people of color, immigrants, people with disabilities, people who identify as LGBTQ+, people with low income or low levels of educational attainment, and women who identify with any underrepresented community.

Specific Suggestions:

Historical Representation

- Tell the history of underrepresented groups that are significant to the development or community of a place from the perspective of the underrepresented group if possible.
 - Include stories of the people who worked on infrastructure and/or cultivated the land.
 - Highlight significant events, historical moments, or social justice movements that were led by or that affected underrepresented communities.
 - Consider hiring a historian or a communications person who has experience amplifying the histories and/or stories of underrepresented communities.
- Collaborate with tribes to highlight their historical, ecological, or cultural knowledge of the area
 - Acknowledge that many of our “pristine” outdoor spaces were stewarded by indigenous people for thousands of years prior.
 - Engage with tribes to tell their stories and their history from their perspective.
- Acknowledge past traumas and/or atrocities committed or still being committed against groups.
- Acknowledge the true firsts and accomplishments of underrepresented communities that dominant colonial narratives have discredited or ignored.

Present-Day Representation

- Highlight the present community’s voices and stories.
 - Describe who “the community” is made up of and consider highlighting a community member’s story about the place.
 - Include who visits, uses, and stewards these spaces.
 - Highlight culturally significant practices, ceremonies, and celebrations that occur in the space.
- Combat the social and cultural erasure of Native peoples by drawing a clear connection from their history to their presence today. Include modern images of Native people and their ongoing work and advocacy if possible.
- Acknowledge the resilience of underrepresented communities and empower them in the written materials and images.
- Have an inclusive and inviting message or imagery for visitors that emphasizes all are to be welcomed in the space. Reinforce zero tolerance for exclusionary acts and hate-based language towards race, sex, gender, immigration status, culture, etc.

Additional Considerations

- Acknowledge the on-the-ground and advocacy work done by communities for these outdoor spaces, not just the big names and donors involved.

- Acknowledge identities that have not been celebrated or accepted in society. Be mindful that you are not exposing a person's protected identity or citizenship status without their consent.
- Acknowledge that people who identify with multiple underrepresented groups experience different modes of privilege and oppression. This is referred to as intersectionality.

Accessibility

- Translate messages into languages reflective of the community. A translation could do this work or we recommend to see if a community based organization in the project area can be compensated to provide translation/interpretation.
- Use ADA text and color contrast guidelines, include other accessible material (braille, audio).
- Use plain language to make it easier for the public to read and understand the content of the materials.

Resources

- Guidance on plain language, visit: <https://www.plainlanguage.gov/>
- ADA requirements for effective communication: <https://www.ada.gov/effective-comm.htm>