

Interpreting to the Public: Supporting Diversity and Inclusion through Interpretation

Presentation Notes

Duration: 1½ hours

Pre-Presentation Activity

Before you start the Power Point presentation, begin with the trading activity. Please see Appendix A for a copy of this activity.

Presentation

Slide 1: Interpreting to the Public

Explain to your participants that they will be learning how to interpret to visitors to your site, with a focus on diversity and inclusion. You can use the pre-presentation activity as a transition. Mention that questions can be asked at any time.

Slide 2: Agenda

Briefly go over the agenda for the presentation. Touch on each area, providing a quick synopsis of what will be covered in each. Let your participants know they will be doing some case studies during the presentation, where they will be working in small groups.

Slide 3: Diversity and Inclusion: Working Definitions

The first area you will talk about are working definitions of diversity and inclusion, specifically in the context of your cultural institution.

Slide 4: Definitions for Museums

You can edit these definitions to suit the needs of your organization. Go over each of the definitions, providing examples from your site, where possible. For example, the Waterloo Region Museum is next-door to a correctional facility. We occasionally have incarcerated persons come over for a visit, accompanied by two or three guards. I mention this as a specific example to our new interpreters as to the diverse visitors we receive here at our museum.

Slide 5: Know Your Audience

Transition to talking about your audience, by using your specific example from the previous slide as a segue. You are going to go over certain demographics of your visitors to your site. For our data, we collect age and postal code. These are the two aspects our graphs focus on. You can tailor this to suit the data your institution has available.

Slide 6: Evolution of Visitor Involvement

According to recent research, these are the five stages of visitor involvement. These are not static; all visitors will not start at step one and end at step five, in that order. Visitors will come to your museum at a variety of stages; some will come for multiple reasons. You need to try to identify the stage(s) they are at, in order to provide them with the best customer service.

Go over the stages with your new interpreters, explaining each thoroughly by providing an example. Step one is about recreation. Basically, this means that visitors come to your site for entertainment. They are looking for a fun and interesting activity to do, so they decided to come to your site. An example of this could be a family visiting from out of town, who are looking for a way to spend their day. They do not necessarily want to leave having learned something new; they are looking for entertainment for their family. Step two focuses on refuge. This refers to visitors who come to your site because they feel safe and welcomed there. They have been probably a few times and continue coming back to repeat some of the activities or to simply sit and/or walk around. An example could be a parent with a baby, who comes fairly regularly to walk around with their child in a stroller. Step three focuses on knowledge. This is the visitor who comes to your site looking to learn about the topic you are presenting. For example, this could be a visitor who comes asking many questions about your specific area of focus and wants to leave with new information. Step four is about visitors who are connected to your site. They might be members, attend several of your special events and workshops because they want to support your institution. They believe in your mission and mandate and they want to be a part of it. These are visitors who ask about job opportunities. The final stage is support. These are people who have progressed beyond the point of visiting and have chosen to become volunteers with your institution, or to sit on a board and develop fundraising initiatives for the site. They support your museum, not because they personally benefit from it, but because they want your institution to flourish and grow.

After you have gone over the five stages, reinforce to your new interpreters that these stages are guidelines; visitors will come for many different reasons and be at different, or even multiple, stages. There is also not a “best” stage to be at. Our goal is not to get all visitors to stage five; our goal is to meet the needs of these visitors, regardless of the stage they are at.

Slide 7: Our Audience

Share your audience data with your interpreters, in a clear way. Graphs work well, or charts. Discuss some general trends with regards to your visitors, while emphasizing that this is not the ‘rule.’ For example, our visitors are overwhelmingly families with children under the age of 12, from Waterloo Region. However, this does not mean that we will only ever have local families visiting. We have visitors from other provinces and countries visiting too.

Slide 8: Interpretive Methods

Just as we have been discussing the variety of our visitors, we need to know a variety of ways to reach them. Explain that you will now be talking about different interpretive methods.

Slide 9: What is interpretation?

Provide your new interpreters with this definition of interpretation. Summarize the definition in your own words, to assist with comprehension. It is, essentially, having conversations with people which connect them to your site by making meaningful connections. Provide a concrete example of making a meaningful connection, drawing on your own experience. This will make it more authentic for your interpreters. For example, I talked about a young boy who visited me in our Scottish house on site. I was talking about Hogmanay, a Scottish New Year's celebration. The boy, who was seven years old, wanted to talk about toys, movies and television shows he liked. I chatted with him about his favourite toys, movies and shows, then guided the conversation back to Hogmanay by asking if he ever received any of those items as presents for his birthday. I then asked if he was happy when he received those gifts. Next, I asked if he thought children from a hundred years ago would be excited to receive gifts too. From there, I was able to transition to talking about Hogmanay. I made a meaningful connection for this boy, by helping him make a personal connection to children from a hundred years ago.

Slide 10: Conversation Starters

Slide 11: Meaningful Connections

There are three things that can be focused on to help facilitate meaningful connections; tangible, intangible and universal concepts. To use something tangible in your interpretation, you would physically point to an object and/or artifact in your vicinity. You might pick it up (if it's allowed to be handled) and show it to the visitor. You are appealing to their five senses with this item. This would help to explain a certain aspect of your institution to them. For example, a visitor might be confused about how a steam engine works. We have a working wooden model at our site to help interpret Hazel, our very large steam engine, to them. This physical piece helps our visitors to comprehend one of our major artifacts, thus making a meaningful connection.

For intangible things, you will appeal to your visitor's (or your own) memories and/or associations. For example, you might ask the visitor about where they grew up or their home town. You could ask them how they feel about their home town. They might recall some memories from growing up, which you can then connect to your site, by talking about how your site is meant to make them feel. For example, our heritage village recreates the community of Doon. Many people living in Doon would feel the same way about their home town as your

visitor feels about theirs. This is a fairly specific example; you will have a different one for your site.

For universal concepts, there are certain topics that every human being can relate to, regardless of their background. If you discuss or engage with the visitor on one of these topics, you can help them make a connection to your site. You could discuss any of the topics listed on the slide.

Slide 12: What is not interpretation?

Go over each of these points, providing examples of each. Alternatively, you could ask your new interpreters to provide one example of each “how not to interpret” point. Interpreters should avoid lecturing *at* the visitor. A lecture-based style of interpretation is NOT wrong; there are people who learn best this way. What we want to avoid is simply talking at our visitor, and not letting them be part of the process. This normally happens when an interpreter believes they are the absolute expert on the subject area and view the visitor as a passive receptacle for the answer. Visitors should be a part of the conversation; if they are not, then there is no conversation. Try to avoid focusing on small details. Interpreters will naturally become very passionate about certain subject areas, sometimes focusing on small details. For example, an interpreter might focus on the process of making Springerle (traditional German edible Christmas ornaments), but they may lose sight of the big picture, and be unable to explain general German Christmas traditions. This can be frustrating for the visitor. Finally, interpreters should do their best to not let their biases influence how they interpret. This will be covered later in the presentation.

Slide 13: Ways to Interpret

This slide discusses the different methods of interpreting to the public. These six methods provide new interpreters with a variety of ways in which they can engage with the public. Go through each method, providing an example of each. Your site might have different interpretive methods, depending on your area of focus.

Slide 14: Case Studies

Ask your audience to split into three groups. Give each group a case study. For this first part, the interpreters will be asked to read a scenario in which they are approached by a visitor. They will then answer five questions as to how they would interpret to this visitor.

Slide 15: Being Aware of Bias

Move on to talking about bias. Explain to your new interpreters that everyone has bias. The purpose of talking about bias today is NOT to get rid of bias; this is not possible. The focus is on making yourself aware of your own biases and then being careful to not let these show through in your interpreting.

Slide 16: Types of Bias

These are all of the ways in which human beings can be biased against one another. You can mention the Implicit Association Tests (IATs) created by Harvard University, if you like. This link can be found in the “References” document.

Slide 17: General Advice

These are some tips on how to avoid presenting your own biases when interpreting. Share these tips with your new interpreters. Encourage them to not make assumptions about any visitors, based on their appearance. Ask them to use inclusive language. For example, offer the chance to look at a toy doll to both boys and girls, not just girls. Finally, ask the interpreters to self-monitor. Every so often, they should think about the language they are using to explain a certain aspect of your site. They should monitor their assumptions about the kind of visit a visitor is looking for. Did you provide them with a brief interpretation, because you assumed they weren't interested because they were teenagers? These are the types of behaviours interpreters should be aware of.

Slide 18: Sensitive Historical Topics

Generate a list of sensitive topics your site covers in daily interpretation. I generated this list based off of types of histories we discuss here at the Waterloo Region Museum. Share these topics with your new interpreters. This is to make interpreters aware that they will be engaging with some sensitive topics.

Slide 19: Interpreting Sensitive Historical Topics

This is a list of what should or should not be done when talking about these sensitive topics. Add your own ideas from your site. One of the biggest positive things an interpreter can do is acknowledge the history. If a visitor asks you how Indigenous peoples were treated in your area, present them with evidence-based information. This information should be from reliable and accurate sources. Remind your interpreters to never present their own opinions as FACTS. They can, of course, share their opinions in certain situations with visitors. However, they should never present their belief as fact. For example, an interpreter should not say: “The Japanese were completely barbaric in their treatment of North American soldiers during the Second World War.” This not only presents an opinion (“completely barbaric”) as fact, but also sets up a dichotomy of “us versus them” (by comparing Japanese to North American). It also makes a blanket statement that all Japanese were like this. Instead, an interpreter should say: “Some Allied soldiers were placed in internment camps in Japan. The conditions of these camps were not supportive of human life. Japanese-Canadians were also interned in Canada, during the Second World War.”

Slide 20: Accommodating Exceptionalities and Diverse Needs

You will now be talking to your audience about accommodating visitors with exceptionalities and diverse needs. For the purposes of this presentation, there is a difference between exceptionalities and diverse needs. Exceptionalities typically involve some kind of formal diagnosis, whereas “diverse needs” refers to visitors who might need additional support from staff, because of the background they are coming from.

I like to emphasize here that all visitors have *needs*, when they visit a museum. By this, I mean all visitors are coming to visit for different reasons and are hoping to get something different out of their visit. Visitors also come with a wide variety of learning styles, so they will learn the content of your site differently. There are many different theories on learning styles; I prefer to use Fleming’s. His four different learning styles are: auditory, visual, kinaesthetic and verbal

However, visitors are not only coming with different learning styles. Some visitors are coming with a very specific background, which might require more accommodation. For example, you might have refugees and/or displaced persons visiting your site. They will have special needs. They might need more support with language. They might be sensitive to loud noises, or images of communities being destroyed. Encourage your interpreters to be cognizant of this when they are interpreting.

There will be visitors coming to your museum who have exceptionalities, which normally involve some kind of formal diagnosis by a physician. Interpreters need to know how to accommodate these visitors, in order to ensure an engaging visit.

Slide 21: What are exceptionalities?

There is a bit of cross-over with this slide, but touch on these four key points with your interpreters. Exceptionalities can be emotional, physical or mental. You may be able to see the exceptionality, or not. It is important to remember that exceptionalities are diverse and specific to the individual. There is no such thing as a “cookie cutter” exceptionality. There will be variations in all exceptionalities.

Highlight to your new interpreters that the expectation is NOT for them to “diagnose” visitors. Their job is not to figure out the type of exceptionality the visitor has, and then figure out which interpretation strategy to use. The goal of this section is to make interpreters aware of the different types of exceptionalities they might encounter, and provide them with general strategies they can implement with ALL visitors. All of the strategies mentioned in the presentation will help any visitor, regardless of if they have an exceptionality or not. This is one of the wonderful things about being inclusive of diversity; often, what works for one, benefits many more.

Slide 22: Examples of Exceptionalities

This slide provides your interpreters with information on the different kinds of exceptionalities they might encounter. These five different types come from the Ministry of Education. I explain each area to the interpreters and provide examples, where needed.

Slide 23: What are diverse needs?

Provide your interpreters with information on what diverse needs are, highlighting the points on the slide. Emphasize that diverse needs are specific to the individual.

Slide 24: Examples of Diverse Needs

Provide your interpreters with the following examples of diverse needs. You can tailor this to match your site. Ask the interpreters what needs these visitors might have. For example, ELLs might want to practice their English, but they need a supportive and non-judgemental environment in which to do so.

Slide 25: Interpreting for Exceptionalities and Diverse Needs

Explain the following strategies to your interpreters. Use concrete and personal examples, to make meaningful connections with your audience. Ask your audience to provide you with examples as well of what strategies they have used to support visitors.

Slide 26: Case Studies

Have your audience work in small groups on your case studies. Have them make small presentations at the end, to share their ideas with the group.

Slide 27: Who can I talk to?

Provide your interpreters with information on who they can talk to if they have a question, comment or concern about diversity and inclusion. If possible, have these people in the room, so they can meet them.

Slide 28: Thank you!

Thank your audience for their participation in your exercise.

Appendix A

Diversity Trading Activity

Prior to your group arriving, print off the information cards on the Gares and the Nires. Gather your set of coloured craft (popsicle) sticks, making sure there is a variety of colours. Write one colour on each information card. If some people have the same colour, this is fine, as long as they are not from the same group. For example, two Gares cannot both have the colour purple, but one Gare and one Nire can each have the colour purple.

To implement this diversity trading activity, split your group in half. Send one group to one side of the room and the other group to the other side of the room. Choose one group to be the Gares and the other group to be the Nires. Give each group their appropriate information card (see pages 3 and 4). Instruct them to read it over silently.

Explain to your groups that the purpose of the activity is to follow the instructions on each card, in order to trade craft sticks. The object of the game is to get as many craft sticks of your colour as possible. Distribute the craft sticks, giving approximately 5 to each person. No one should start with a craft stick which is the colour they need.

There are two rounds. The first round is when the Gares only trade with the Gares and the Nires only trade with the Nires. Have the groups start trading. After they have all successfully traded and everyone has the colours they need (or, until time has run out), have them reset the craft sticks, so no one has the colour they need. Now, the second round begins. The Gares can only trade with the Nires and the Nires can only trade with the Gares, in this round. Have the groups trade.

After both rounds are finished, have a debriefing session with the groups. Which round was easier? Why? How did people feel when they were trading? Did anyone experience frustration, confusion, worry? After you have answered these questions, ask the group what they think the connection between this activity is and diversity/inclusion. This activity simulates interactions with different members of the public. For some, you will come from the same cultural background. You will understand the same language and social cues. For other members of the

public, you will not come from the same background. You might speak different languages and you might have different social cues. However, you and your customer will both be trying to achieve the same goal; accessing service. By understanding differences through embracing diversity and inclusion, people will be better able to serve the public.

You are a group of people known as the Gares. For the Gares, politeness is the most important thing in the world. As soon as someone is disrespectful or rude, by not asking how they are or saying thank you, they walk away and do not want anything to do with them, until they apologize.

The Gares trade by saying the following phrases (they must be done in this order):

Person 1: “Kah soh mi?” = How are you?

Person 2: “Re mi. Kah soh mi?” = I’m good. How are you?

Person 1: “Re mi. Ung blee chee?” = I’m good. Would you like to trade?

Person 2: “Omayo.” = Yes.

the two people trade

Person 1: “Poy.” = Thank you.

Person 2: “Poy.” = Thank you.

You are a group of people known as the Nires. For the Nires, efficiency is the most important thing in the world. As soon as someone is inefficient, the Nires try to make them go faster, by encouraging them on. They will try for a few moments to make someone go faster, even if that person is walking away from them.

The Nires trade by saying the following phrases:

Person 1: “Olio poi?” = Want to trade?

Person 2: “Iko.” OR “Jiko.” = Yes. OR No.

They trade, or not, and then leave

