

Erica Fielder Studio

interpreting our heritage

by design



since 1983

Interpretive Display RFP Checklist

Specifications to Include in RFPs for Outdoor Interpretive Signs, Exhibits and Displays

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Including comprehensive specifications for your project in your Request for Proposal (RFP) makes it easier for contractors to submit accurate bids, ensures that only qualified contractors make the short list, and boosts your chances of ending up with a product that you're proud of. Erica Fielder Studio (EFS) has prepared this checklist for you to use when putting together your next RFP for interpretive exhibits and displays.

- Credentials:** Set forth any requirements you have for your contractor: whether they should have a certain number of years of experience, have worked on a certain type of project, or have specific expertise. Ask for references and be sure to call them.
- Work Samples:** Specify how many and what kinds of work samples you want to see. If your project is intended to foster stewardship of the local environment, for example, you may want to ask for samples of displays with this intention.
- Your Visitors:** In a few paragraphs, describe your primary visitor group or groups — their age, demographics, knowledge level, and so on. In addition, specify:
 - Whether your site attracts school groups.
 - What special needs your site accommodates.
- Budget:** If possible, include your estimated budget for this project, or a budget range. If you have questions about budgeting your project, take a look at our free, printable "What's My Budget?" Checklist.

- ❑ **Themes:** A theme is a statement that determines what each display will communicate. Will your themes be developed before the project starts, will your Design Firm develop the themes, or will you develop them in collaboration with the Design Firm?
- ❑ **Text:** Establish whether the Design Firm will write the text from scratch or edit supplied text. If the Design Firm will write the text, also specify:
 - ✓ Who will do the bulk of the research.
 - ✓ What resources you will supply for the research.
- ❑ **Illustrations:** Don't assume that proposed designs will include hand-drawn or painted illustrations unless you've specified this as a requirement in your RFP. If you're undecided but willing to pay a bit more for original illustrations, say so in the RFP.
 - ✓ Note whether your agency or the Design Firm will do the bulk of the research for illustrations.
- ❑ **Photos:** If photographs will appear in your displays, consider the following and include your decisions in the RFP:
 - ✓ Will the Design Firm provide the photographs or will you?
 - ✓ Will the project use historic photos that need cleaning and sharpening? If so, ask bidding contractors for evidence of experience in sprucing up historic or poorly photographed images. (Please do not clean and sharpen them yourself! Let an experienced interpretive design firm do this for you.)
- ❑ **Maps:** Keep in mind that maps add to a project's expense. So, if your project requires maps, be sure to mention this in the RFP and to include the following details:
 - ✓ Who will supply the map(s).
 - ✓ Whether graphics or artwork will be created for your map(s).
 - ✓ If you're supplying the maps, specify the file format (Adobe Illustrator, for example) and whether the discreet layers of the map are intact so they can be taken apart and reassembled for the display. If you're not sure whether your map will need to be recreated, EFS can help you figure this out.
- ❑ **Project Timeline:** It's okay not to have a detailed timeline at this point, but include at least these two pieces of information in your RFP:
 - ✓ Project start date.
 - ✓ Final deadline, either for receiving the finished design proofs from the contractor or for completed installation of your displays. (Allow 6 to 8 weeks for fabrication after final corrections on digital files.)

- ❑ **Site Visit:** If your project requires a site visit, note the following:
 - ✓ Are you covering expenses for the site visit?
 - ✓ How long do you expect the visit to take?
 - ✓ What should be accomplished during the site visit?

- ❑ **Deliverables:** Specify exactly what you want the Design Firm to deliver, whether digital files or a complete installation. However you choose to handle fabrication, your contractor should offer to stay in the loop to provide advice and troubleshooting through to the end of the project.

- ❑ **Sign Materials:** State any preferences you have about sign materials. (Your Design Firm should give you advice on this, but expect a guaranteed lifetime of at least 10 years.) Also include the following information in the RFP:
 - ✓ The level of graffiti or vandalism you have at your site.
 - ✓ Your site's environmental conditions: salty air, high moisture, desert heat, and sun, snow, or wind.

- ❑ **Mounts:** Include the type of mount you plan to use for your displays. Indicate whether the displays will be mounted in-ground, on a railing, or on a wall.

- ❑ **Taxes & Shipping:** Specify whether you'd like taxes and shipping included in estimates for the project cost.

- ❑ **Panel Installation:** Once delivered, who will install your panels? Usually a volunteer or your agency maintenance person will install them. Specify whether you'd like your designer to help you determine the correct ADA height and placement for panel accessibility no matter who installs.

Thank you for using this checklist. If you have any questions, or you'd like to suggest additions to the checklist, please don't hesitate to email us at efielder@mcn.org. May all your Requests for Proposals result in successful projects!

