

Interpretive Master Planning: What, Why, When, Who, How

Eddy Dawson, Director of Programs, Red Butte Garden & Arboretum

Sarah Fiorello, Interpretation Coordinator, Cornell Botanic Gardens

Chuck Lennox, Principal, Lennox Insites

Libby Rhoads, Public Programs Supervisor, United States Botanic Garden



What is Interpretation?

Interpretation

is a purposeful approach to communication that facilitates meaningful, relevant, and inclusive experiences that deepen understanding, broaden perspectives, and inspire engagement with the world around us.






What is an Interpretive Master Plan (IMP)?

- An inclusive **decision-making process** that involves staff and others at informal learning institutions to **develop a plan** for visitors to those sites
- **Guides development of visitor services** at a site or facility
- Blends **management needs** and consideration of the **resource** with visitor needs
- Helps **determine essential messages, stories, information and experiences** and the **most effective methods** to communicate them to key audiences

Inspiration: [Wikipedia](#)



Consider Visitor Experience Plans

Decision	Transportation	Site Wayfinding	On-site Orientation	Grounds Orientation	Activities On-Site	Engagement On-Site	Departure	Post-Visit Engagement
<i>Anticipation/ Nervous</i>	<i>Details</i>	<i>Confident</i>	<i>Calm</i>	<i>Clarity</i>	<i>Excited</i>	<i>Warmth</i>	<i>Memories</i>	<i>Belong</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How easy is the website to use? • Can I find directions, hours, admission and events? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do I drive, use public transportation or ride service (accessed via a smartphone)? • Are they accurate—directions/time? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do I know where to turn? • Do I park my vehicle or walk in a particular direction? • Do I know where the entrance is located? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do I know what my next steps are? TICKETING, RESTROOMS, WATER, ENTRANCE TO THE GARDEN, EVENTS, PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES WHILE I AM ON THE GROUNDS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the conditions like on the grounds? PATHWAYS, ELEVATION CHANGES, COMFORT LEVEL, SHADE, RESTROOMS AND WATER, EXITS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is there to do? • What's special about this place? • What will appeal to those in my party? • What do I need to see? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do I get my questions answered? • Who can tell me more about the Garden? • Where can I go to get an Instagram-worthy photo? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where is the exit? • Where can I purchase a memento of my visit? • Did they appreciate my visit (Thank you for visiting)? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where can I go to leave a review (social media)? • Where can I learn more? • What if I want to volunteer? • What else is available at the Garden for a future visit?
								
.....BEFORE		DURING		AFTER		

What is included in an IMP?

- Inventory/Background/Significance
- Goals and Objectives for the Plan (& Interpretation)
- Audience/Visitor Analysis
- Market Analysis/Competition
- Themes/Messages
- Visitor Experience – Wayfinding/Needs/Activities
- Evaluation
- Resources





5 min of questions



Why? Cornell Botanic Gardens

**An interpretive plan works to
achieve your garden's mission.**



Mission/vision



Management or Strategic Goals



Interpretive Program Goals




Interpretive Program Objectives





This is important because...

The plan clearly communicates
how interpretation will **impact**
your garden.



Hodinḡhsḡ:nih Heritage Plants

The Hodinḡhsḡ:nih, the Indigenous people of upstate New York, have a deep relationship with the five plants growing in this bed.



The Three Sisters, c1936, watercolor by Ernest Smith (Tonawanda Seneca), courtesy of the Rochester Museum and Science Center.

Corn, beans, and squash provide a well-balanced diet of nutrients, carbohydrates, and protein.

The Three Sisters

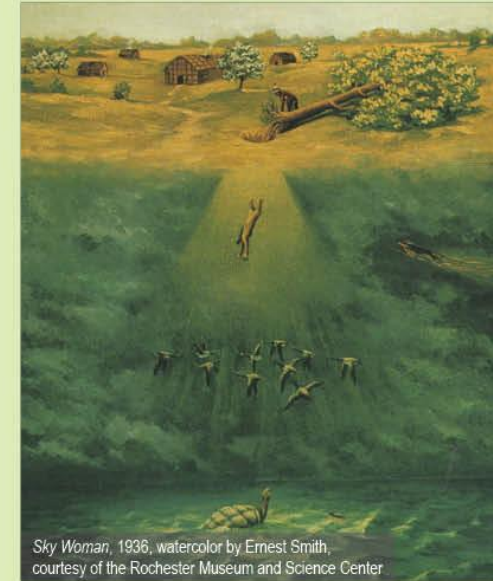
Like you see here, corn, beans, and squash were traditionally grown in an intercropping system known as the Three Sisters, which helped provide everyone in their communities with an abundance of healthy food for thousands of years. To the Hodinḡhsḡ:nih, protection of the earth is their most important responsibility. Growing corn, beans, and squash in this way protects and nurtures the soil and does not require synthetic pesticides and non-organic fertilizers that are harmful to the environment.



Sunflower seeds are also a staple of the traditional Hodinḡhsḡ:nih diet and provide a healthy source of fat. When Skyholder was creating animals and plants on Turtle Island, he created the sunflower, that it would measure the approach of the sun.



Tobacco is used to maintain a connection to the Sky World by conveying intentions and messages of the people.



Sky Woman, 1936, watercolor by Ernest Smith, courtesy of the Rochester Museum and Science Center.

Seeds of the Creation Story

The Hodinḡhsḡ:nih view these five plants as important gifts from the Sky World. In the Hodinḡhsḡ:nih creation story, corn, beans, and squash grew from the body of Skywoman's daughter and tobacco grew out of her heart. Ceremonies are held throughout the year to express their gratitude for these plants.

2 GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

INTERPRETIVE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Interpretive goals and objectives ensure that the interpretive media and services recommended in this plan focus on achieving Cornell Botanic Gardens mission, vision, and strategic goals.

The following table lists the interpretive goals and objectives and their relationship to the strategic goals.


INTERPRETIVE GOAL	STRATEGIC PLAN CONNECTION	INTERPRETIVE OBJECTIVES
Goal 1: Understand and appreciate the inextricable link between biological and cultural diversity.	Nurture the unique and personal connection people have to plants. <ul style="list-style-type: none">Expand our interpretation to highlight the interconnectedness of plants and peoples Cultivate and conserve plants and the cultures they sustain. <ul style="list-style-type: none">Highlight and celebrate biocultural diversity by linking biological and cultural diversity throughout our natural areas and gardens.	Visitors will: <ul style="list-style-type: none">A. Recognize and appreciate that biodiversity is essential to the health of Earth's ecosystems and to successful horticulture—critical to human survival.B. Feel inspired to explore the rich diversity of cultures and plants that sustain tomahem around the world as a result of their visit to Cornell Botanic Gardens.C. Recognize that many cultures around the world are threatened by the decline of biodiversity, industrialization, and climate change and that conserving the world's cultures and languages is a pathway to conserving the world's threatened biodiversity.D. Recognize and appreciate that languages are representative of diverse world views and value systems of cultures and the loss of these languages erases the understanding of this rich diversity of human experience.E. Explain in their own words the meaning of biocultural diversity and conservation





This is also important because...

**The plan provides a justification
for the time and money spent
on interpretive services.**



Why? *Red Butte Garden & Arboretum*



Why? *Red Butte Garden & Arboretum*

- Unify our interpretive efforts
- Develop a process for creating interpretation
- Identify themes and unify our messaging
- Understand who is coming to the Garden
- Understand who is not coming to the Garden
- Create a better guest experience
- Support funding efforts



Why? *United States Botanic Garden*



Why? United States Botanic Garden

Welcome to Bartholdi Park

Since 1932, the centerpiece of Bartholdi Park has been the stately cast-iron *Fountain of Light and Water* designed by Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi for the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia. The park was recently renovated as a sustainable garden, certified at the SITES® Gold level by Green Business Certification Inc™.

The park incorporates many best practices in sustainable landscaping including reducing rainwater runoff, reusing plants and materials, locally sourcing sustainable materials, growing native plants, and providing food and habitat for wildlife.

Use this journal to learn about sustainability as you explore Bartholdi Park.

Please help us conserve this living museum by staying on paths and not picking any plants, fruits, or flowers.



As you explore Bartholdi Park, look for this oak leaf to help you find examples of these features:



1. Material Conservation
2. Sweetbay Magnolia
3. Dry Fruit
4. Fleshy Fruit
5. Franklin Tree
6. Water Conservation
7. Grass Diversity
8. Oak Diversity
9. Kitchen Garden
10. Carnivorous Plants



- Rain Garden
- Kitchen Garden
- Bartholdi Fountain
- Administration Building

USBG Brief History



202-730-9303

Stop 1

Garden Court Plant Highlight

Theobroma cacao

The Chocolate Tree

The pods you see growing on the chocolate tree contain seeds of “cocoa beans” that are used to make chocolate!

Theobroma cacao grows only in humid tropical regions near the Equator, primarily in Africa (Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Cameroon, and others). Other cocoa-producing countries include Indonesia, Brazil, Ecuador, the Dominican Republic, and Belize.

A tree starts producing pods when it is four or five years old. During the five months it takes them to ripen, the cocoa pods change from green to yellow, orange, and/or brownish-red. Farmers harvest the ripe fruit by hand. Next, they split open the pods and put both fruit and cocoa beans in piles and leave them for about a week to ferment. Afterwards, the beans are spread out to dry in the sun.



The farmer sells the dried beans to processing companies that roast and crush the beans into a paste called chocolate liquor (also called “bitter” or “baking” chocolate). This is used to make chocolate candy and other goods such as cocoa powder and cocoa butter, used in food and as a skin softener.

DID YOU KNOW that about 6.5 million small family farms grow over 80% of the world's cocoa beans?

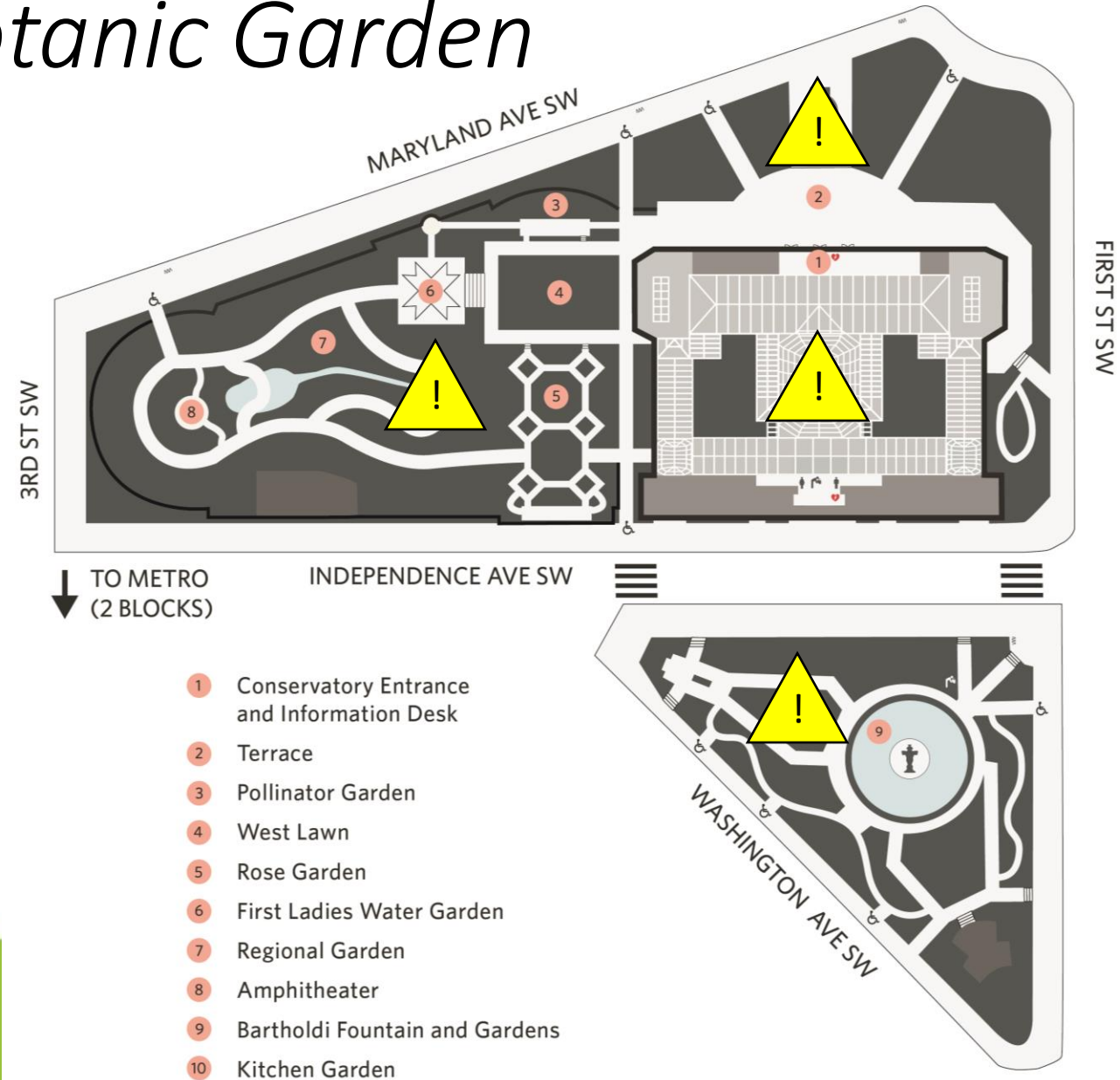


UNITED STATES
BOTANIC GARDEN

Why? *United States Botanic Garden*



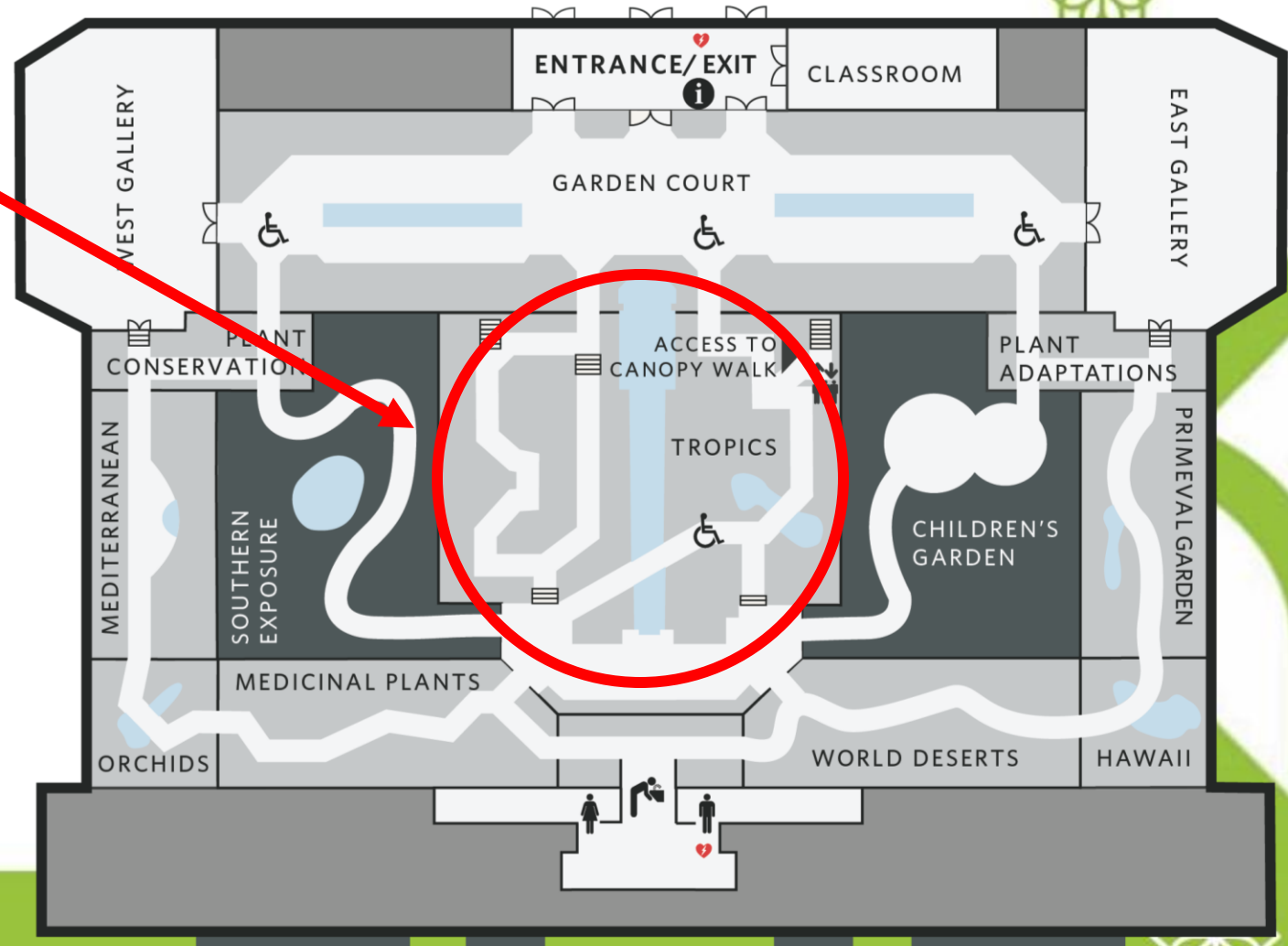
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Why? *United States Botanic Garden*

What's this room called?

- *Tropics*
- *The Tropics*
- *The Tropics House*
- *Jungle*
- *Tropical Forest*
- *Rainforest*
- *Tropical Rainforest*
- *The house on the way to the restrooms...*





5 min of questions



When? Cornell Botanic Gardens

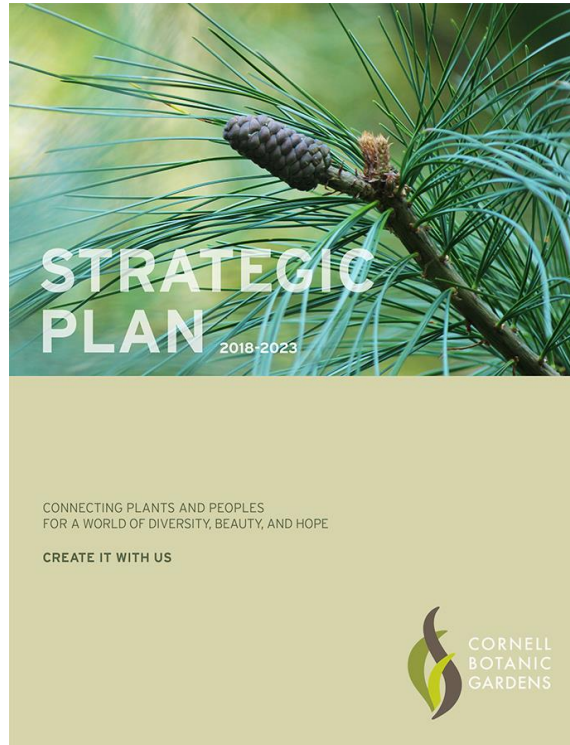
2016: Name change approved!



Click to add text



2017-18: Revise mission, vision, values, strategic goals



2019: Audience Prioritization

Focus on:

- Cornell students
- Supporters (donors, volunteers)
- Visitors (tourists, locals)



2019- 2020: Interpretive Planning Process



When? *Red Butte Garden & Arboretum*

- 2014-2017 Strategic Plan
- RFP process started in 2019
- Started in May 2020
- Finished in May 2021



When? *United States Botanic Garden*

1999

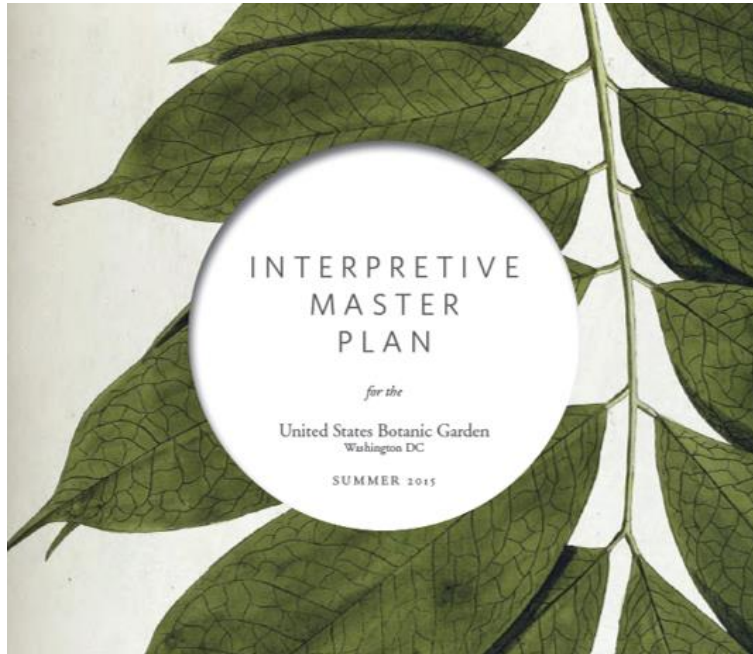


UNITED STATES BOTANIC GARDEN

Interpretive Master Plan

October 1999

2014



INTERPRETIVE
MASTER
PLAN

for the

United States Botanic Garden
Washington DC

SUMMER 2015

2016

IMPACT PLANNING • EVALUATION • AUDIENCE RESEARCH



**SELECT CONSERVATORY ROOMS:
FRONT-END EVALUATION**

*Prepared for the
United States Botanic Garden
Washington, DC*



When? *United States Botanic Garden*

2018

2020

2022



INTERPRETIVE MASTER PLAN



UNITED STATES
BOTANIC GARDEN

Developed in cooperation by Lennox Insites • March 2020





5 min of questions



Who? *Cornell Botanic Gardens*



Staff Involvement

Planning group represented all program areas:

- Horticulture
- Natural Areas
- Education
- Communication
- Development



Staff Involvement

- All staff invited to participate and provide feedback at key points.
- One-on-one meetings with our director.

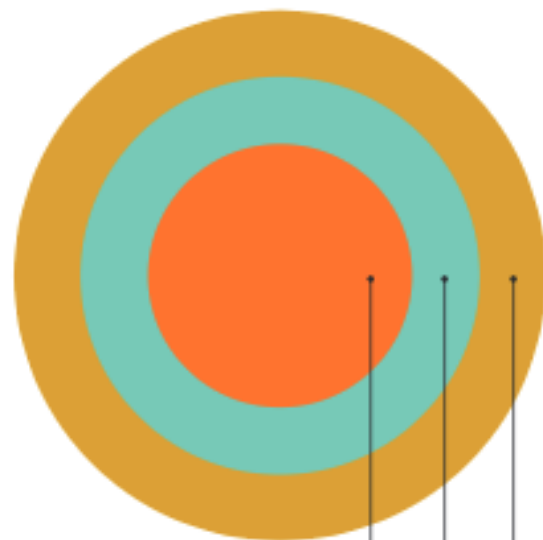


External Involvement

- Advisory Council
- Volunteer docents
- Student interns



Who? *Red Butte Garden & Arboretum*



Core Planning Team

Advisory Group

Greater Community



Who? *Red Butte Garden & Arboretum*

- Core team made up of representative(s) from each department
- Community leaders
- Ex EDs
- University partners
- Consultants (Lennox Insites, Partners In Design, and Kari Nelson (guest survey))



Who? *United States Botanic Garden*

HOW TO USE THIS PLAN

This Plan should be used to address the needs of the visitor and to organize and prioritize the USBG's approach in doing so.

The following personas and potential use scenarios are examples of how the USBG team (employees, volunteers, and contractors) would use this plan.



USBG Employees

Garden employees use the Plan and its accompanying documents (Literature Assessment, Implementation Priority Strategy, Research Inventory) as a reference guide to determine priorities and the next steps in an interpretive project.



Planning, Design, or Exhibit Consultant

A contractor hired for specific projects consults the Plan for guiding principles and the character of interpretive and wayfinding elements. As Garden areas are refurbished, the Plan indicates the type of wayfinding or interpretive features that might be considered for use. The Plan offers a set of ideas and assists project managers in phasing for potential future installations. The Plan identifies key interpretive themes that could be used to communicate the importance of plants and the Garden to visitors.



Volunteer and/or Docent Coordinators

These team members use the Plan to orient new volunteers or docents to support them in providing engaging visitor experiences and quality interpretation. While planning training for volunteers, the Coordinator consults the plan to determine what components of the informal visitor experience described in the Plan can be implemented with the support of volunteers.



Education Team

The Plan may be consulted as interpretive programs are developed to match student needs, requirements of visiting schools, adult and family programs, accessibility programming, and the resources at the Garden.



New Employee Orientation Planning

While planning orientation for new employees, the Plan is consulted on how best to develop an overview of the Garden as an initial introduction to this historic and special place.

This Plan was developed as a living document—

one that is practical, hands-on, and expected to be used. Documents developed for this plan (Literature Assessment, Implementation Priority Strategy, Research Inventory) are separate Excel documents that can be easily updated. Keeping the Plan accurate and up-to-date will fulfill its purpose to support interpretation at the Garden.



Who? *United States Botanic Garden*

It's USBG Core Team Squares!



*Your host!
(aka Contractor Liaison /
Project Manager)*

Executive
Director

Deputy
Executive
Director

Team
Managers

Visual
Information
Specialist

IMP
Consultant/
Contractor

Landscape
Architect &
Horticulturist

Media &
Public Affairs
Specialist

Interpretive
Specialist

Access
Coordinator



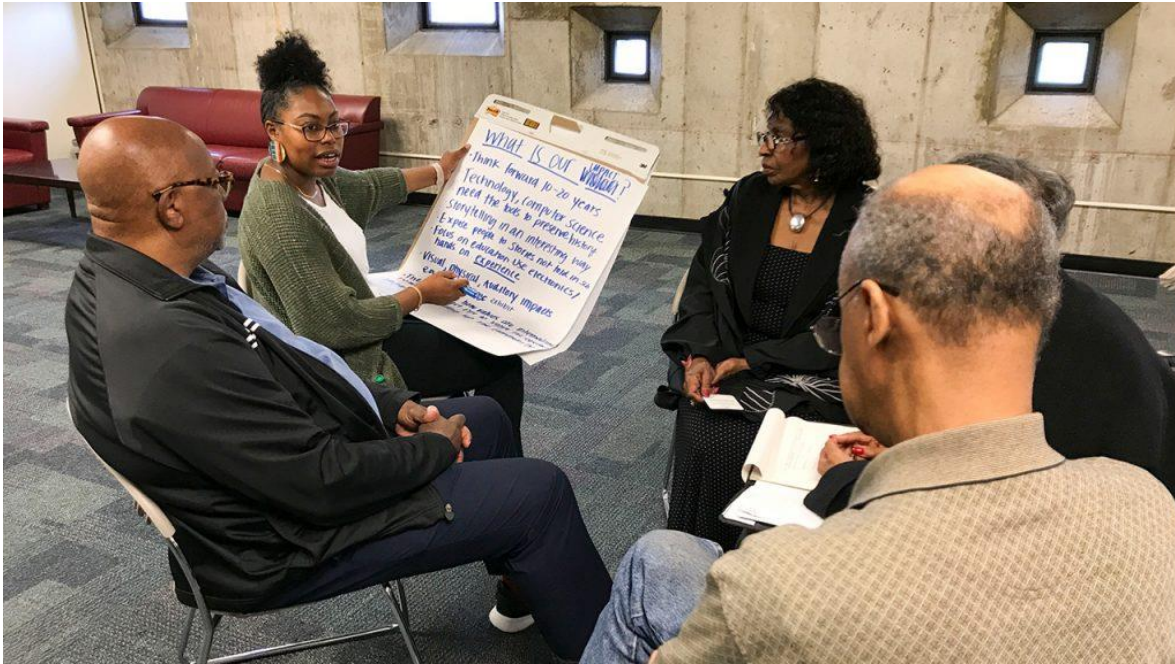


Photo Credit: www.106Group.com

5 min of questions



How? Cornell Botanic Gardens

LAY THE FOUNDATION

- Goals and Objectives
- Profile Audiences
- Inventory:
 - opportunities
 - parameters

Wh  Botanic
Gardens

DEVELOP THE PLAN

- Interpretive Themes
- Visitor Interpretive Experience
- Recommendations
- Prioritized timeline



Interpretive Planning Process

LAY THE FOUNDATION

- Goals and Objectives
- Profile Audiences
- Inventory:
 - opportunities
 - parameters



Interpretive Planning Process

DEVELOP THE PLAN

- Interpretive Themes
- Visitor Interpretive Experience
- Recommendations
- Prioritized timeline



Two top tips: *Cornell Botanic Gardens*

- Take the time needed to inventory your potential interpretive opportunities, and visitor needs, motivations and interests.
- Prescribe the ideal "visitor interpretive experience" and identify what your site needs make this happen.



How? *Red Butte Garden & Arboretum*

Garden Room Entrance Interpretive [THEMED/COLLECTION] GARDENS



The Rose Garden



How? *Red Butte Garden & Arboretum*

- Put it in the strategic plan
- Find Funding
- Hire expertise RFP (x2)
- Virtual site visits
- Interviews with community leaders
- Core interpretive team meetings
- Do or do not, there is no try (pandemic)



Two Tips *Red Butte Garden & Arboretum*

1. Include all stake holders in the process, including those from the community.
2. Communicate! Let everyone at the Garden know what you are doing. Let the board know.



How? *United States Botanic Garden*

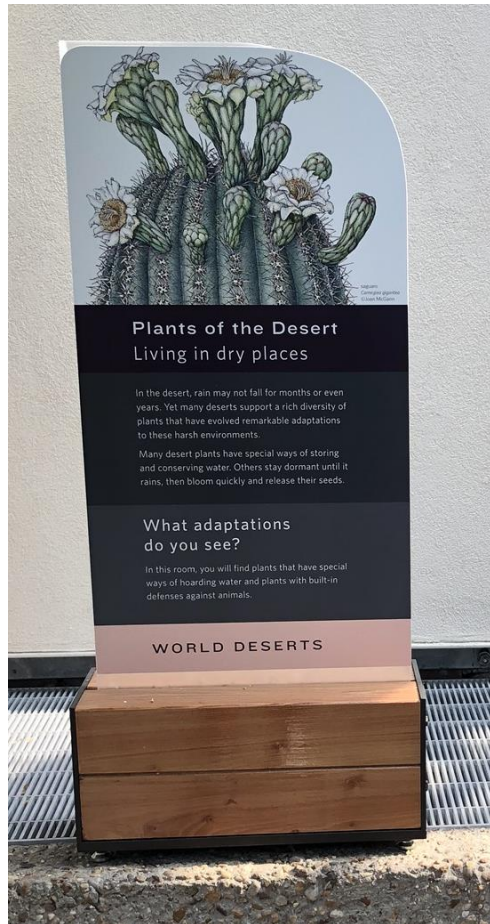


USBG Interpretive Master Plan Overarching Theme:

Inspired by the welcoming, sensory, and restorative experience, visitors appreciate the diversity of plants, value the essential connection between plants and people, and embrace the stewardship of plants and the environment.



How? *United States Botanic Garden*



Big Idea Sign Plant Stories Sign Plant Highlight Sign



How? *United States Botanic Garden*

Toilet Pitchers

Mountain tree shrews (*Tupaia montana*) are attracted to nectar on the hoods of pitchers of the tropical pitcher plant (*Nepenthes lowii*). While licking this nectar, the shrews are perfectly positioned to use the pitcher as a toilet. Rain flushes the poop down into the pitcher, delivering much-needed nutrients to the plants.



TROPICS

Overall Theme

Tropical forests are a vital ecosystem on the Earth—providing food, regulating climate, influencing hydrological cycles, sequestering carbon, and supporting more biodiversity than any other habitat.

Topics

Evolution and adaptation, leaf diversity, structure of tropical forests—layering, seasons, global locations, role in global climate change, deforestation/conservation

Stories to Tell

- Tropical rain forests are some of the most biologically diverse (species richness) ecosystems in the world.
- There are a variety of tropical forests around the world with seasons and rain cycles.
- Many houseplants are tropical rain forest species.
- Gaining the perspective of looking into the exhibit's canopy from the canopy walkway gives one a better understanding of the diversity of ecological niches in these forests.
- This exhibit is supported by complex engineered climate control systems.
- We are losing tropical forests at an unprecedented rate due to habitat destruction from agriculture, mining, and logging.



How? *United States Botanic Garden*

Top Tip #1:
**Get Everyone
On Board!**



How? *United States Botanic Garden*

Top Tip #2:

Make It Flexible!





Interpretive Master Planning Questions for our Presenters



Thank you for coming!

Interpretation is a seed not a tree.

National Park Service

