

2021 National Meeting - Culture & Heritage Committee Breakout October 5, 2021

The outline below is simply meant to spur and guide our conversation. Please be prepared to add to or modify it.

What do we offer IC's that apply for our affiliation with them?

- Marketing and promotion that can increase their visitation.
 - Social media
 - Maps
- The opportunity to be part of something bigger.
- What sites need or benefit from the above and which don't care, since they do so much of it on their own? Major institutions versus county historical societies or small town museums.

Marketing and Product Delivery

If you market a product for its exceptional qualities, that product cannot disappoint the consumer. We market the Great River Road at the national and state levels. We do so to get more people to travel along it and visit our interpretive centers. Those who see our marketing and are inspired to travel the Great River Road will have a higher expectations than those who find it randomly. Interpretive centers are one of our products. The road is another. Our committee can most effectively focus on the centers.

The Marketing Committee is developing a three-year plan to more intentionally promote the Great River Road, especially where it is an All-American Road (AAR). It is our committee's responsibility to make sure we don't disappoint our visitors.

Purpose of Culture & Heritage Committee Breakout: Start developing a 3-year Culture & Heritage Committee plan.

Goal: The Culture & Heritage Committee will explore direct and indirect ways to help Great River Road interpretive centers capture the national and regional (multi-state) significance of their sites. In doing so, we will leverage the AAR status. By stressing the national and regional significance, travelers will be more inclined to visit our sites, as they will see them as something greater and more important than just another place.

- To ensure interpretive centers are putting local Mississippi River stories in a regional (multi-state) or national context and presenting them well should be our goal.
 - Do interpretive centers clearly tell a Mississippi River story or stories?
 - Do they put those stories in a regional or national context?
 - Are their exhibits of a high quality?

Direct help could include strengthening their nationally and regionally significant stories and how they tell them. Here, we would focus on an limited number of sites that most needed and wanted our help.

- We could connect ICs that need help with ICs that have the expertise or staff to help advise.

- We could help ICs get grants to improve their exhibits, both the physical presentation and content.

Indirect ways could include identifying key national and regional stories and resources and then develop rack cards, itineraries and internet pages that highlight those resources and stories. Here, we could focus on many more sites. We could define a level of quality any interpretive site would have to meet before we'd promote them using one of the above methods.

- We already provide indirect help through marketing.

Expectations

Our nomination form already has high expectations. Are our interpretive centers living up to what they said they would? Section 1 of the nomination has these expectations:

- “Our goal is to have a network of premier institutions that are willing to work together to further the interpretive and marketing goals for the Great River Road.”
 - Premier institutions
 - Working together
 - To promote us. (Not them?)
- “The institution must interpret the Mississippi River or some significant aspect or relationship to the river with a high level of quality and be open to the public on a published, regular basis.”
- “What story does your institution tell about the Mississippi River as part of its regular daily visitor experience?
 - How does it relate to the themes for interpretation which are attached?
 - Why do you feel that this significant aspect or relationship to the river is presented at a high level of quality?
 - Describe the quality of the visit your guests receive.”

Section 2 - Duties and Obligations - states:

- “Members of the network must ensure that front line personnel who have contact with the public are knowledgeable of and will promote the Great River Road and the museums and interpretive centers in the region. Describe how you will ensure that your front line personnel will be trained, briefed and monitored.”

Potential Strategies

1. Get a solid understanding of the breadth and depth of the stories our interpretive centers tell and the quality with which they do so. How many are at the “premier” level, and how many offer “a high level of quality”? We need to find out.
2. Get a clear understanding of which interpretive centers could use our help and in what ways, directly or indirectly. Don't assume simple and local character are bad. Need to distinguish between local charm and poor quality.
 - Send out a survey or have each state do so.
 - We might need to develop a specific list of each type of need - direct and indirect - rather than leaving it open ended.
 - Review responses and determine next steps.

3. Determine which are living up to their commitment of becoming a Great River Road interpretive center and which aren't.
 - Have each state assess its interpretive centers.
 - What improves the traveler experience? Exhibit quality? Staff engagement and knowledge?

4. Reaffirm what being an Great River Road interpretive center means. Inform interpretive centers of what AAR status means and how they can use it to their advantage.

5. Go through existing itineraries, rack cards and website to see how we present our interpretive centers.
 - Are we capturing their significance in how we present them to the public?
 - Do the thematic groups hold together or are there better groupings and, therefore, better coherence?
 - Look at how they promote themselves.

6. Set clear expectations for new interpretive centers before accepting them.
 - How can we strengthen application form?
 - A model nomination might help.

7. Expand the Ambassador program Minnesota is developing to other states.

We will need to consider which strategies we might pursue each of the next three years.

Interpretive Centers

- Which are delivering and which are not?
- Which are solid but could be better?
- Who needs our help and who doesn't or doesn't want it?
- All the above shows that we need survey of each state's ICs.
 - Survey - with prefix of being a national parkway, a National Scenic Byway and an All-American Road.

Recap

C&H Committee is the Product Delivery Team

How can we help ICs up their game to AAR status, if needed?

- Jessica - Arkansas - Don't presume simple ones are not valued in their own way.
 - IPW's emphasis on Americana

Need a good handle on status of each IC and what their needs might be - How?

- Each state's check lists - often contain good comments on needs
 - Committee should get all that we have and review them.
 - Revise to ask questions about what help they would like to see from us.

- Get together with IC Directors - maybe by type - County historical societies, e.g.

Products

- 10-State Map
- Tour guides - itineraries related to themes or geography - marketing
 - Passport - Iowa
- Signage -
- What else?

Ambassador Program - MN

Mr. Ingo talked about the RV Tours he conducts.

Can't do the work we needed in a one-hour Zoom call. Need poster boards and markers.

<https://mrpcmembers.com/interpretive-center-visit-checklist/> Checklists are now online forms on the new website. They will automatically post to the Culture & Heritage committee page.

Wondering if there's a way to add a question or 2 about ICs needing help in messaging and welcoming to diverse audiences. Maybe that could be an area of support from the cultural committee. Sara Strassman

With regard to welcoming new groups to the river, the Upper Mississippi River Conservation Committee has a field trip grant program for schools to bring classes to the River. Application is on this page: <https://www.umrcc.org/oreit>

Are you engaging with the Augsburg Uni kids that are floating the river trying to learn about American culture, history, social experience? We might have some ready made projects for them to dig into: <https://www.augsburg.edu/river/>

Louisiana's Houmas House Interpretive Center application. Since we did not get it until so late and given that it needed more work, we did not vote on it at this meeting.