

# Final Report

## Interpretation and Communications



2 December 2025

## BACKGROUND

In Fall 2024, the Association of Nova Scotia Museums (ANSM) launched Year 2 of the TRACK program at all four regional heritage group meetings. Participation in TRACK remains an eligibility requirement for the Community Museums Assistance Program (CMAP) and continues to be supported by the Nova Scotia Museum. A total of 119 museums registered for TRACK, with 113 participating in some capacity in 2025. This year's focus areas—Interpretation and Communications—guided museums through needs assessments, standards-based questionnaires, and submissions for peer review and coaching. Participants also engaged in a webinar series featuring subject matter experts and received coaching tailored to their interpretation and communications contexts.

Participation statistics at a glance:

- 1 additional museum registered for the program
- 111 Interpretation Needs Assessments were submitted
- 111 Communications Needs Assessments were submitted
- 103 Interpretation Peer Coaching questionnaires were submitted
- 103 Communications Peer Coaching questionnaires were submitted
- 106 Interpretation Standards questionnaires were submitted
- 105 Communications Standards questionnaires were submitted
- 107 museums watched at least one Interpretation webinar
- 105 museums watched at least one Communications webinar
- 93 museums met the participation requirements for being "On TRACK"

This year's 95% participation rate represents a slight increase over 2024. This final report builds on the March 2024 Needs Assessment report, examining the remaining components of the second year of the TRACK program.

## TRACK Working Group

The peer-based working group met bimonthly to offer guidance, identify webinar topics and facilitators, select peer coaches, review feedback, and support the overall development and delivery of the program. In months without a meeting, the Programs Manager kept the group informed through updates and progress reports.

Working group members:

- Barry Rodenhiser, Atlantic Canada Aviation Museum (Chair)
- Joanne Boudreau, Fultz House
- Amy Coleman, Museum of Natural History
- Alyssa Giles, ANSM
- Karin Kierstead, ANSM
- Kellie McIvor, Halifax Regional Municipality (ex-officio)
- Claire Roach, Old Sydney Society (January - August 2025)
- Danielle Serratos, Fundy Geological Museum (January - March 2025)

## TRAINING

From January through August 2025, six online group training sessions were offered. Each session was recorded, with the recording sent to attendees in a follow-up thank-you message encouraging them to share it within their organization. Recordings were also made available for request through ANSM's website. This year's training included:

### **1. Preparing for TRACK 2025 webinar**

A one-hour overview and Q&A session of the year's TRACK activities and how museums could prepare. The session was offered on January 13th, delivered by ANSM's Programs Manager, Karin Kierstead. 90 people participated, and an additional 20 requested the recording. To date, the recording has been watched 174 times.

### **2. Heritage Group Meetings**

Devin Casario, ANSM's Executive Director, led a conversation about political advocacy, sharing information about ANSM's recent efforts and inviting museums to share their own activities.

### **Tuesdays on TRACK Webinar Series**

ANSM was once again encouraged by the strong engagement with this webinar series. Museums continue to tell us that the format, timing, and ongoing access to recordings are incredibly valuable. Recordings remain widely used for onboarding and training new staff, volunteers, and board members, with continued interest in sessions from previous years. The freely available 2022 webinars were viewed an additional 120 times, 2023 webinars were requested 7 times, and 2024 webinars were requested 10 times this year.

The 2025 lineup included:

**May 13 - Inclusive Innovation: Using Technology to Make Museums Accessible to All**

Vanessa Chatten of CANUS Museum Consulting explored how museums can use accessible technology to create inclusive visitor experiences. She shared practical tools, case studies, and guidance on selecting tech that aligns accessibility goals with each museum's digital strategy. 56 people participated live, 42 requested the recording, and the recording has been viewed 102 times.

**June 17 - Interactivity: powerful but...**

Adam Fine of Fathom Studios led an engaging discussion on exhibit interactivity, covering its potential to boost engagement alongside challenges in design, maintenance, and accessibility. The session explored different types of interactives, their costs and benefits, and how they can serve museum goals. 74 people participated live and 49 requested the recording, which has now been viewed 99 times.

**July 15 - Social Media for Museums: Tackling Today's Challenges**

Victoria Castle of the Nova Scotia Museum followed up on her 2023 social media session, teaching participants how to choose platforms ethically, engage audiences inclusively, manage comments, streamline workflow, and use generative AI. 66 people participated live, 38 requested the recording, and the recording has been viewed 49 times.

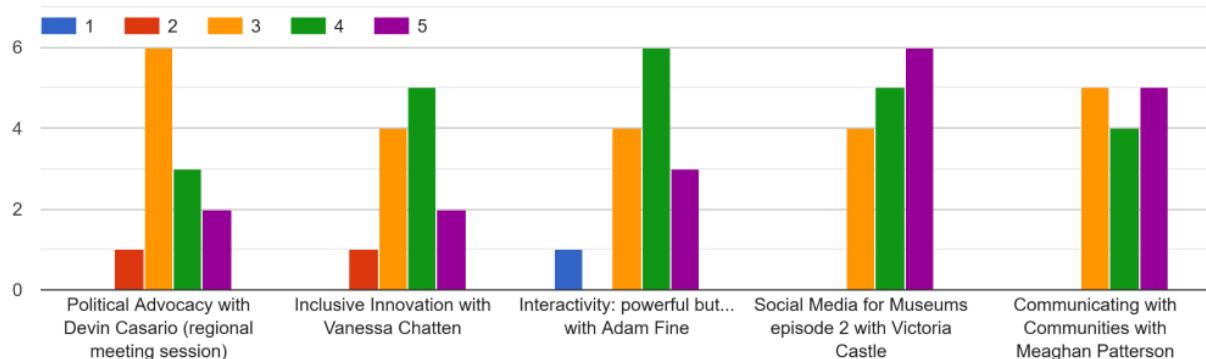
**August 12 - Communicating with Communities**

Meaghan Patterson of the Royal Alberta Museum guided a session on building community connections, using the Reconsidering Museums toolkit to explore strategies for meaningful, sustained engagement that benefits both museums and their communities. 63 people participated live, 38 requested the recording, and the recording has been viewed 87 times.

A training survey was circulated in November 2025 to get feedback on the year's offerings and obtain suggestions for improvements. While only 16 individuals responded, they shared some very helpful feedback.

The following chart outlines which sessions were found to be most helpful.

Please rate this year's training sessions' usefulness to your museum, with 1 being not at all useful and 5 being very useful.



When asked whether they had implemented or planned to implement information from TRACK sessions, respondents shared the following:

- **Implementation:** Museums plan to apply social media tips, ways to better meet visitors' physical and language needs, interactive signage or devices, and exhibit-related visitor metrics.
- **Future planning:** Many found the material useful for shaping 2026 offerings and will revisit resources and links during planning.
- **Website accessibility:** Respondents noted the importance of treating accessibility as a broad priority, while acknowledging that some tools are too costly.
- **Sharing information:** Learnings will be brought to boards, and staff have been encouraged to attend sessions or watch recordings.
- **Community engagement:** Plans include deeper engagement with seniors to record stories and collaborations with local schools.

When asked how ANSM could improve TRACK training sessions, respondents suggested:

- **Acknowledging diversity:** Tailor content to the varied realities of small/large and staffed/volunteer museums.
- **More interactivity:** Include scenarios or virtual breakout groups for discussion.
- **Shareable materials:** Provide more written resources alongside webinars.

Additional comments were positive and appreciative. Participants value the sessions, noting they feel supported and part of “one big team.” Several expressed gratitude, calling the sessions one of the most beneficial elements of TRACK. A few noted challenges motivating board members to participate and suggested improving inter-museum communication.

## RESOURCES

ANSM staff curated a diverse range of resources in direct response to the needs and requests identified by museums through the TRACK Needs Assessments. These materials—including articles, toolkits, templates, and case studies—were drawn from international, recognized leaders in museum interpretation and communications. Resources were shared through the TRACK email list to ensure timely access for all participating museums, and where relevant, specific resources were incorporated directly into individual museum reports to provide tailored guidance and support.

## ASSESSMENT

The assessment component of TRACK consisted of three elements: Needs Assessment, Peer Coaching, and Standards. Online questionnaires were provided for each, with downloadable PDFs offered as an alternative for those who preferred them. Museums submitted a range of file types securely through ProjectSend, which served as the program’s file transfer platform and ensured safe handling of all submissions.

### **1. Needs Assessment**

The interim report explored responses to the Needs Assessments for both Interpretation and Communications. Interpretation responses identified the need for assistance and training in accessibility/assistive technology, interactivity/hands-on exhibits, evaluation techniques, and engaging visitors. Communications responses identified social media, public engagement, advocacy strategies, website renewal, and marketing strategies as the top priorities. This feedback informed the development of the heritage group advocacy session and Tuesday on TRACK webinar series, with each facilitator briefed on the relevant Needs Assessment findings during planning discussions.

### **2. Peer Coaching**

In May, ANSM issued a call for peer coaches, inviting museum professionals with expertise in Interpretation and Communications to apply for this component of TRACK. The working group reviewed applications and selected the strongest candidates. The Interpretation coaching team included Marc Belanger, Catherine Cole, and Thomas Long, while the Communications team comprised Alison Knott, Casey Smith, and Bryce Watts. Both teams exceeded expectations in their interest, engagement, and quality of feedback to museums.

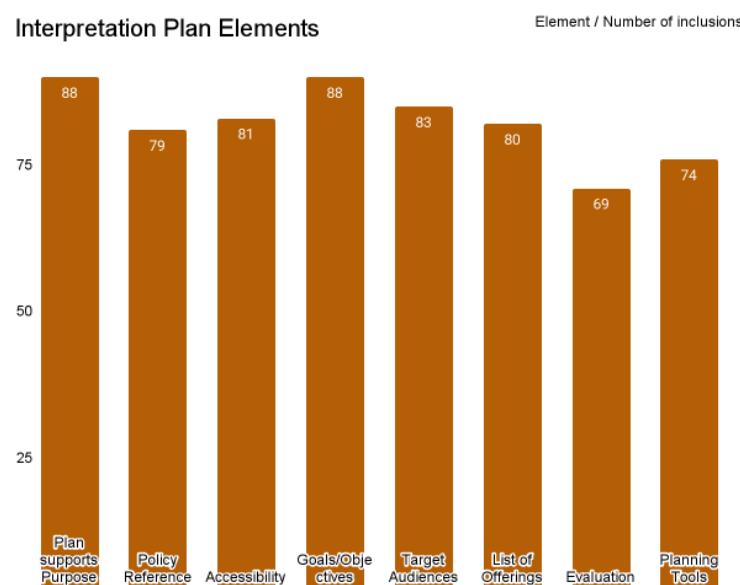
Interpretation peer coaching focused on exhibits and programs. Museums were invited to submit photographs and examples of a recent program, exhibit, or interpretive offering that the museum developed and delivered, explaining why it was developed, what community need the museum was responding to, whether it met those needs, and who was included in the process. Coaches gave their professional opinions on the museums' exhibits/programs, highlighting strong points, sharing suggestions for improvements, and encouraging museums to ask key questions in future development efforts.

Communications peer coaching invited museums to share three examples of marketing files, explaining their goals with each submission. Coaches again gave their professional opinions, celebrating strong and successful campaigns, encouraging museums to put existing branding to good use, and giving suggestions on language, graphic design, audience considerations, and free tools/resources that could help to elevate their marketing efforts.

### 3. Standards

Responses to the standards questionnaires were reviewed internally by ANSM staff. Individual feedback was incorporated into each museum's report, with links to helpful resources.

The Interpretation Standards questionnaire invited museums to submit their Interpretation Plan for review, and provided a checklist of elements that are usually included in such documents. Many of the submitted plans were very strong and provided excellent guidance to staff and volunteers, including almost all of the elements from the assessment



questionnaire.

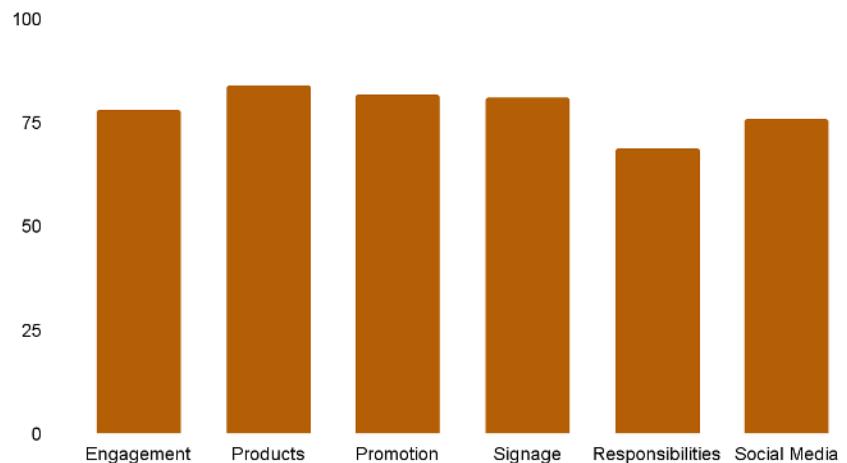
Other themes from interpretation plan submissions include:

- The majority of responses indicate that plans were reviewed in 2025 in preparation for their TRACK submission. Several museums reported that plans were reviewed in 2024 with fewer reporting that plans were reviewed in earlier years. The oldest review of an interpretation plan was 2011.
- Multiple museums indicated their Interpretation Plans are currently under revision, with some stating the submitted document was a draft or that developing a new plan was on the horizon.
- Several museums mentioned that they do not have a formal document in place because of other priorities within the organization, such as saving the building.

#### The Communications

Standards questionnaire invited museums to submit their marketing strategy and website url. Both questions also included checklists of elements to be expected in these resources. Marketing strategies vary greatly in their level of detail, but the majority of museums have a plan in place. Common questions related to marketing strategies included ethical and efficient use of social media, and how to identify and engage audiences.

#### Marketing Strategy Elements

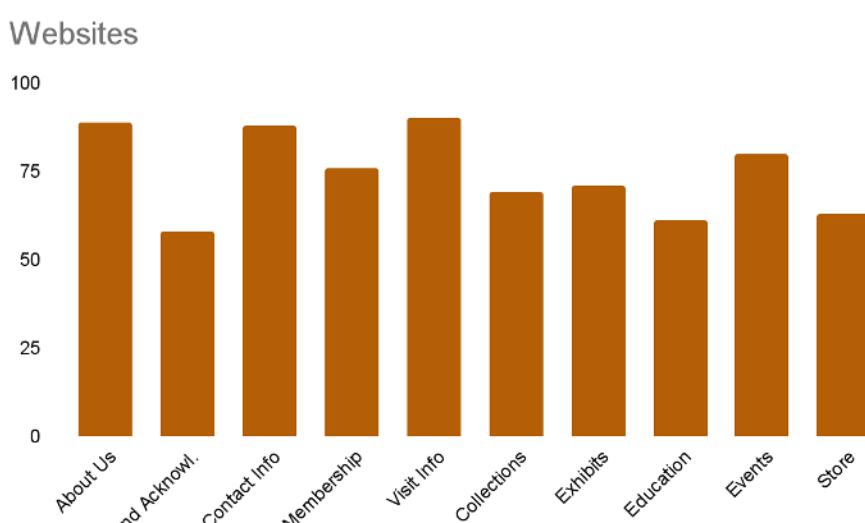


Other themes from marketing strategy submissions include:

- Many responses noted that they were not confident in gauging the effectiveness of their marketing efforts.
- Many museums that contribute to [NovaMuse.ca](http://NovaMuse.ca) do not include this in their marketing efforts.

- Accessibility and inclusivity were highlighted as areas of interest.
- Questions around community input and/or partnerships were common.

Museum websites also vary greatly, except for the consistency within the Nova Scotia Museum family. Most museums included their purpose statement and mandate on the homepage. Beyond the basics, many museums are struggling with their web presence. Accessibility improvements should be a priority for many museums, as font choices, page layout, searchability, and visibility of key information is often problematic.



Category	Number of Websites
About Us	~88
Land Acknowl.	~60
Contact Info	~85
Membership	~75
Visit Info	~88
Collections	~70
Exhibits	~72
Education	~62
Events	~78
Store	~65

Other themes from website submissions include:

- Many responses provided not only the museum's specific website link but also social media links.
- Several museums indicated that they use Facebook as a form of engagement, in lieu of a website.
- Several museums noted that they do not have access to their website so are unable to make updates.
- A few responses stated that they currently do not have a website or that a new one is currently being developed. In these cases funding and capacity were often highlighted as barriers.
- Two museums shared dead links to their websites, unaware that the websites were down.

## COACHING

ANSM staff provided support to participating museums on an as-needed basis, and each

Tuesday on TRACK webinar included a coaching component. In addition to Q&A during the live webinars, a follow-up coaching day was scheduled two weeks later, offering museums 30 minutes of one-on-one time with either the webinar facilitator or ANSM's Programs Manager. These limited coaching slots were offered on a first-come, first-served basis:

- Inclusive Innovation - 7 museums participated in coaching
- Interactivity - 9 museums participated in coaching
- Social Media - 8 museums participated in coaching
- Communicating with Communities - 7 museums participated in coaching

## KNOWLEDGE-SHARING

Knowledge-sharing was woven throughout this year's training offerings and extended into other ANSM activities. At the LAMNS conference in Halifax in October, TRACK also sponsored a panel session on Accessibility in Practice. Chaired by Laura Jones of the Nova Scotia Provincial Library, Maddi Adams of the Nova Scotia Accessibility Directorate shared information about the Built Environment Accessibility Standard, and Caroline Kovesi explored the technological side of the subject through her discussion on Designing with Accessibility in Mind.

Each participating museum received an individual report in late November. These reports summarized overall participation in TRACK, identified who took part in training, provided overviews and responses to the assessment questions, shared feedback from peer coaches, and offered suggestions for strengthening the museum's Interpretation and Communications practices. Relevant resource links were included where appropriate.

Throughout the year ANSM staff connected with museums who demonstrated excellence in Interpretation or Communications, inviting them to share their successes as case studies with their peers. To date, [six Knowledge-Sharing sessions](#) have been added to ANSM's YouTube channel and [one blog post](#) was shared on the ANSM website. Additional museums have agreed to participate and will be interviewed in the coming months.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

As highlighted in the interim report, museums approached their participation with care and intention. Honest assessment responses and continued interest in webinar recordings show that

museums remain actively engaged with TRACK. With 119 museums now enrolled, this year offered valuable opportunities for staff, volunteers, and board members to broaden their professional networks and critically reflect on their current Interpretation and Communications practices. Feedback has been largely positive and included thoughtful suggestions for strengthening future iterations of TRACK. ANSM looks forward to building on this input as the program's third year will explore Financial Stability and Management practices.