

Needs Analysis

Interpretation and Communications



22 April 2025

BACKGROUND

In October 2023 the Association of Nova Scotia Museums (ANSM) launched the TRACK program at each of the four regional heritage group meetings. Participation in TRACK is an eligibility requirement of the Community Museums Assistance Program (CMAP) and has also been adopted by the Nova Scotia Museum. The first year of the program saw an incredible level of engagement from participating museums, and feedback enabled ANSM to further hone the program. ANSM staff introduced the second year of TRACK at the fall 2024 regional meetings, giving an overview of the Interpretation and Communications pillars and program milestones.

An in-depth orientation webinar was held on January 13th, 2025, which again introduced museum staff, board members and volunteers to the various program elements for the year. The primary focus was on preparing for assessment pieces. 90 people from 70 museums participated live, and an additional 18 people requested the recording. The recording was circulated to the TRACK email list (251 subscribers) and has been viewed 38 times. Numerous comments have been received that the webinar was very helpful and people are feeling more at ease with TRACK now that they have experienced the first full year.

107 Interpretation and 107 Communications Needs Assessments were submitted by the February 14th deadline. Three additional Interpretation and four Communications Needs Assessments were received after the deadline. In some cases, museums skipped questions, or checked a box but did not leave comments. These discrepancies are all noted within the report.

SCOPE OF NEEDS ANALYSIS

Needs Assessments invited museums to reflect on their practices, identify opportunities for training, and share their successes. Responses then inform the year's training plan and identify museums to include in Knowledge-Sharing efforts.

The Interpretation Needs Assessment sought to answer:

To what extent does the museum have its major interpretive themes identified, and is delivering exhibits and programs that foster opportunities for critical thinking, dialogue, and social action?

Museums were asked to consider the inclusivity, accessibility, and interactivity of their interpretation (exhibits, programs, and educational offerings), and then to share how they

evaluate interpretation (including its environmental impact), and ensure that it meets community needs. The final question asked museums to identify their top interpretive goal for the next four years.

The Communications Needs Assessment sought to answer:

To what extent is the museum sharing and promoting its programs, services, and activities?

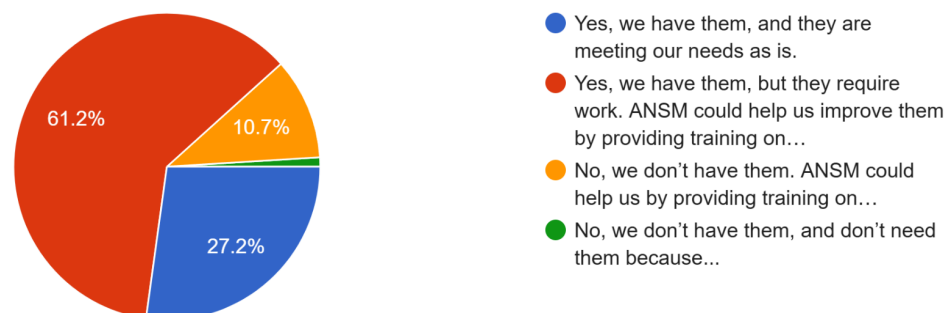
Museums were asked to consider their advocacy and marketing efforts, as well as their online presence. Again, the final question invited museums to identify their top communications-related goal for the next four years.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT RESPONSES

INTERPRETATION

1. Does the museum have inclusive interpretive offerings?

103 responses



The highest training priorities for museums in this area are relationship-building, interpretive planning, and community-led curation and/or collaborative interpretation.

2. Does the museum have accessible interpretive offerings?

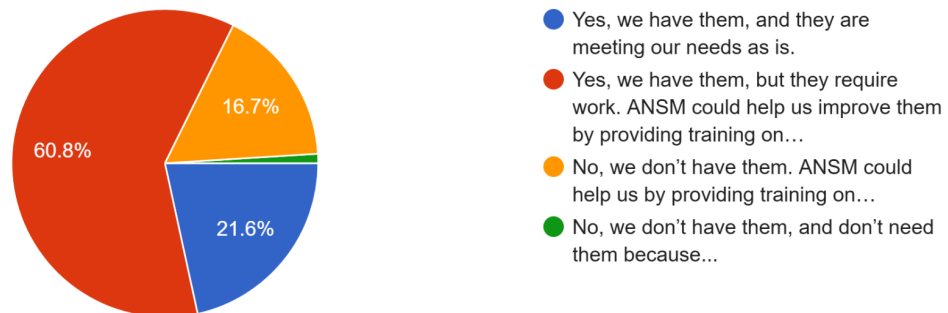
102 responses



Museums requested training on accessibility/assistive technologies that can be implemented in their interpretation offerings, funding programs and low-cost options, and how to address physical space limitations (especially in historic buildings).

3. Does the museum have interactive interpretive offerings?

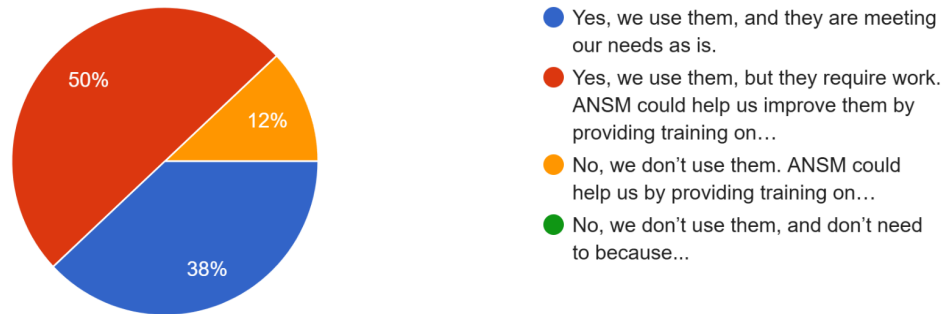
102 responses



Museums asked for assistance in developing school programs and connections, hands-on and interactive elements (both digital and analog), and engaging visitors in a way that invites the sharing of stories and perspectives.

4. Consider methods used to evaluate interpretation.

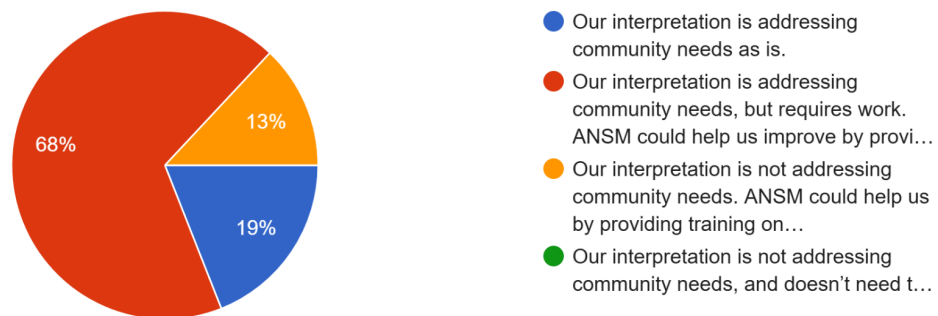
100 responses



The overwhelming training request was on evaluation techniques, with many qualifying comments around new vs. existing programs, and when/where to use what type of evaluation. Other training requests were on how to use visitor statistics and surveys, and again engage visitors in a way that facilitates the sharing of information.

5. Consider how interpretation is addressing community needs.

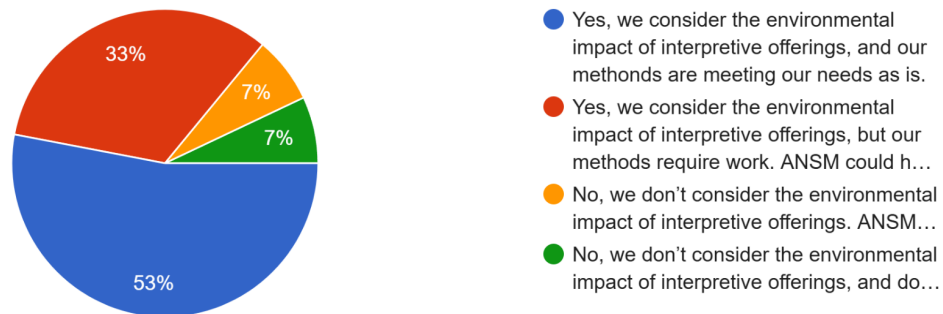
100 responses



Comments on this question circled back to interpretive offerings rather than seeking information about how to identify community needs. The top training requests were around accessibility and assistive technologies, improving interactivity and the number of hands-on elements, and identifying funding opportunities and low-cost options.

6. Does the museum consider the environmental impact of its interpretive offerings?

100 responses



The majority of requests on this question were for examples of what other museums are doing. Specifically, museums wanted to hear about options for sustainable interpretation, accessibility/assistive technologies, and funding opportunities or low-cost solutions.

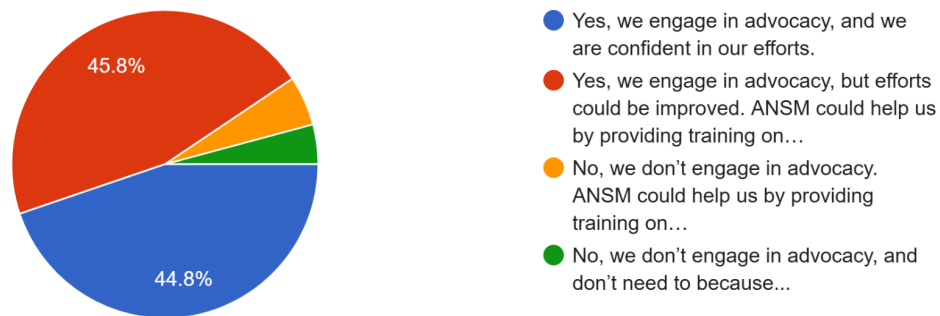
The final question of the Interpretation Needs Assessment asked museums to share their top interpretation-related goals for the next four years. The top priorities are:

1. Interactivity and Hands-On Interpretation
2. Inclusivity and Relationship-Building
3. Accessibility and Assistive Technologies
4. Interpretive Planning and Renewal
5. Sustainable Interpretation

COMMUNICATIONS

1. Consider the museum's advocacy efforts.

96 responses



Museums requested training on advocacy strategies (including templates and quick guides to facilitate the work), political advocacy, and how to improve public interest and engagement.

2. Consider the museum's marketing efforts.

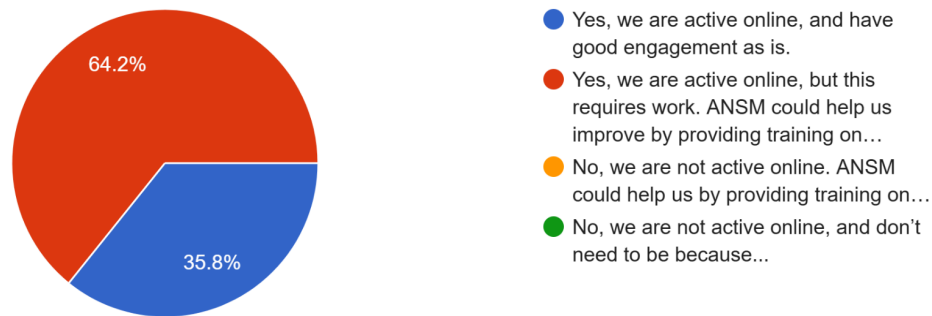
97 responses



Top training requests were around organizational branding, social media (especially for pre-scheduling, ads, and ethics), website renewal, and how to measure success.

3. Consider the museum's online presence.

95 responses



Training requests for this question were very similar to the marketing question, with the top priorities being social media, accessibility/inclusivity, and website refresh/updates.

The final question identified museums' top Communications-related priorities for the next four years:

1. Social Media
2. Marketing
3. Public Interest/Engagement
4. Advocacy Strategies
5. Website Refresh/Updates

NEXT STEPS - TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

With clear training priorities identified, ANSM is actively organizing the TRACK training plan for 2025. This includes:

1. Heritage Group Meetings

ANSM staff will attend each regional meeting and provide an update on TRACK, encourage museums to sign up for webinars, and answer any questions they have about

the May and September assessments. ANSM Executive Director Devin Casario and ANSM board members will also lead a short discussion session on political advocacy. This was not only identified as a priority in the Needs Assessments, but the timing of the Federal Election aligns nicely to remind museums of how to connect, build relationships, and advocate for museum needs on an ongoing basis.

2. Tuesdays on TRACK Webinar Series

While the Tuesdays on TRACK webinars are a spring/summer offering, ANSM continues to hear that these are being used year-round in orientation and training of new staff, volunteers, and board members.

May 13 - Vanessa Chatten of Canus Museum Consultants will lead an insightful webinar that explores how museums and galleries can use accessible technology to create inclusive environments for visitors of all abilities. She will break down practical tools, share real-world case studies, and offer guidance on how to choose the right tech for your space and audience. Learn how to align accessibility goals with your digital strategy — and why putting yourself in the shoes of someone with a disability is one of the most powerful ways to make lasting change. Attendees will leave with practical ideas and tools to help make their institutions more welcoming and accessible to everyone.

June 17 - Adam Fine of Fathom Studios will facilitate an exploration of interactivity in exhibits. Almost every museum curator wants their exhibits to be more "interactive", but the word is broad and trendy, often meaning anything from augmented reality, to touchscreens, to mechanicals, to hiring human re-enactors. Interactives of all kinds can increase your visitor engagement, but each choice introduces new challenges—in design, facility management, maintenance, accessibility, and other areas. This session will talk about the main classes of interactivity and discuss the costs and benefits of each, and how such choices might benefit the museum.

July 15 - Victoria Castle of the Nova Scotia Museum will deliver a follow-up to her 2023 introductory session on social media to explore the key questions museums face online today. Participants will learn how to choose platforms ethically, engage audiences in accessible and inclusive ways, handle negative comments, streamline their workflow through pre-scheduling and other time-saving tips, and implement best practices for using generative AI. This practical session is designed to help museum professionals use

social media more confidently and effectively.

August 12 - Meaghan Patterson of the Royal Alberta Museum will revisit her work with *Reconsidering Museums*. Museums know they need to have strong connections with their communities in order to be vibrant and sustainable, but oftentimes building those community connections can seem overwhelming or daunting. Our communities are evolving, their needs are changing, and the way people spend their leisure time is drastically different from how it was five years ago. Using the lessons learned in the *Reconsidering Museums* project and associated toolkit, as well as examples from museums, this workshop will explore how museums can communicate with their publics in ways that drive meaningful and sustained engagement that serves the needs of both the museum and the community. We will dive into how museums can step into new, and sometimes uncomfortable, situations to build bridges and fulfill their roles as community assets.

3. Knowledge-Sharing

ANSM staff have identified many online resources that support the interests expressed in Needs Assessments. Links are being shared in every TRACK update email, and include everything from funding opportunities to case studies to toolkits. This will continue throughout the year.

This winter has also seen the solidifying of the formal Knowledge-Sharing component of TRACK. As Assessment submissions are reviewed, ANSM staff reach out to museums with inspiring examples and invite them to share these projects and experiences via guest blog post or video interview. To date, one blog post has been shared on [ANSM's website](#), and four video interviews have been [added to YouTube](#). One of the most common requests from museums is to hear what other museums are doing, so it is very exciting to be able to highlight these success stories.

Looking ahead, as ANSM works with partners in the library and archival world to plan a joint conference for October, feedback from Needs Assessments is top of mind. Ensuring that sessions meet the needs expressed by museums is a top priority for the program committee members from the museum sector.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The second year of TRACK is again demonstrating an incredible level of participation and engagement from museums across the province. The openness and thoughtfulness of Needs Assessment responses demonstrates that there is a strong desire to learn and grow. As TRACK seeks to remove training barriers and piggyback on existing events like regional meetings and conferences, there is no doubt that it will become an invaluable resource for Nova Scotia's museums.