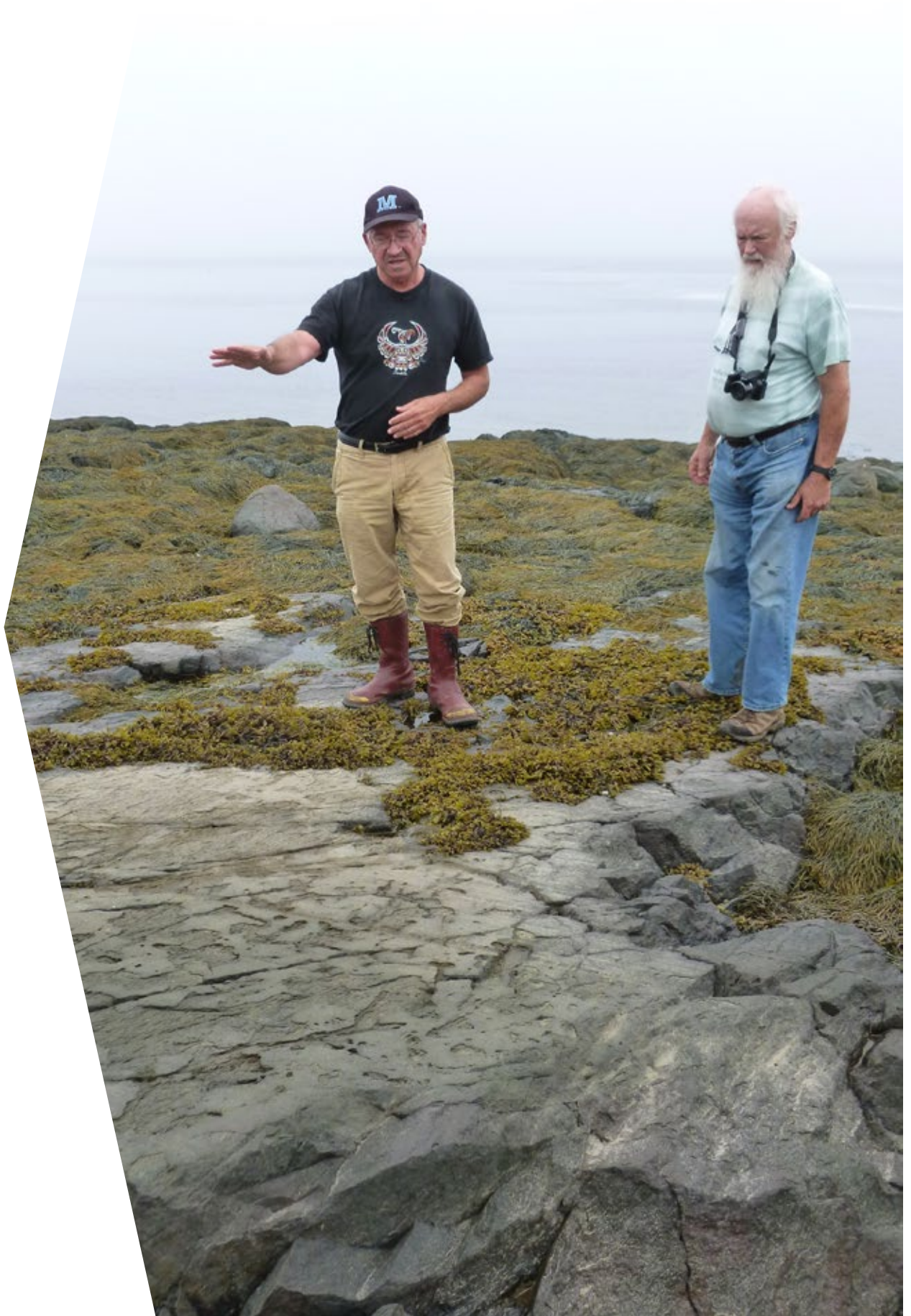


# INTERPRETIVE FRAMEWORK



# WHAT IS INTERPRETATION?

According to the National Association for Interpretation, interpretation is a mission-based communication process that forges emotional and intellectual connections between the interests of the audience and the meanings inherent in the resources.

In short, interpretation is the process where priority messages are identified as being most meaningful to the public and they are aligned with the organization's educational goals.

Interpretation involves examination of objects, historic buildings, and other artifacts, and then finding ways that those physical remnants of past times support the development of both historic and contemporary themes. It is an organized, intentional program of importing information to the visitor.

The chief aim of a museum is to reveal and provoke.

- Who are the Wabanaki and what is their complete story, covering 12,000 years and more?
- How has the experience of encounter and the ensuing contact period impacted Wabanaki people?
- What are the treaties and decisions that politically inform Wabanaki relationships and alliance?
- What are the catalysts for cultural survival?
- How does the past inform today?
- Who are the informants of Wabanaki history and culture?
- What does the Wabanaki experience tell us about our cultural understandings?
- How do culture and language coincide?
- Why are stereotypes harmful and pervasive?
- What does a decolonized museum look like?
- How does Wabanaki culture and history affect the cultural identity of Maine?

## PLANNING PROCESS

After an initial planning and research period in 2011, the Abbe's interpretive planning process began in earnest in 2012 with the convening of the first Native Advisory Council. During their first meeting, participants were asked to participate in an input session where they examined existing messaging and then brainstormed and mind-mapped ideas. This same session format was then presented two more times to community stakeholders, academics, educators, and other informants.

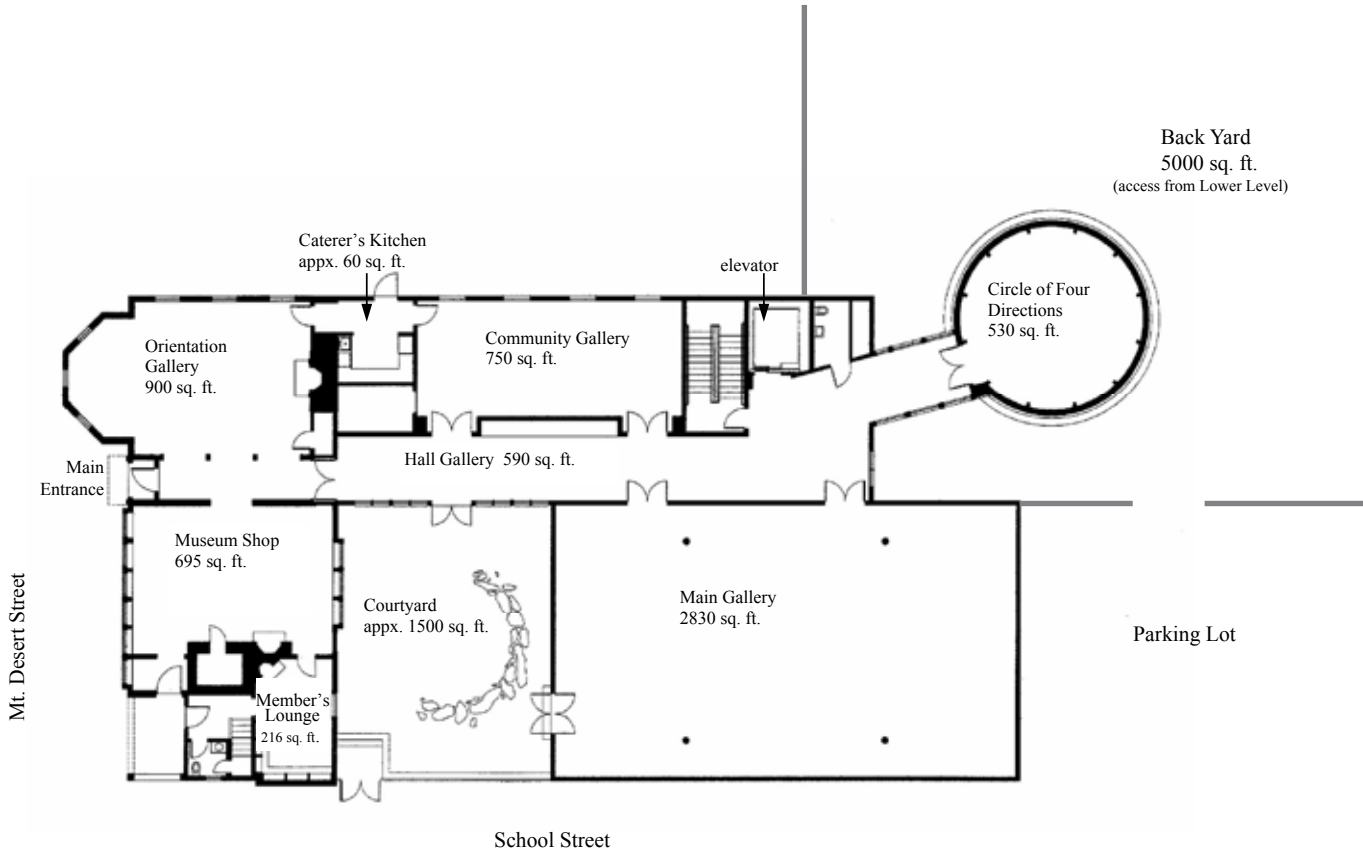
These results were compiled and analyzed for trends and strong messages. The exhibit team worked over the course of 2013 to develop a draft document that was circulated to the participants for final input. In early 2014, the interpretive plan was finalized and integrated into the Abbe's exhibit, program, and collections planning.



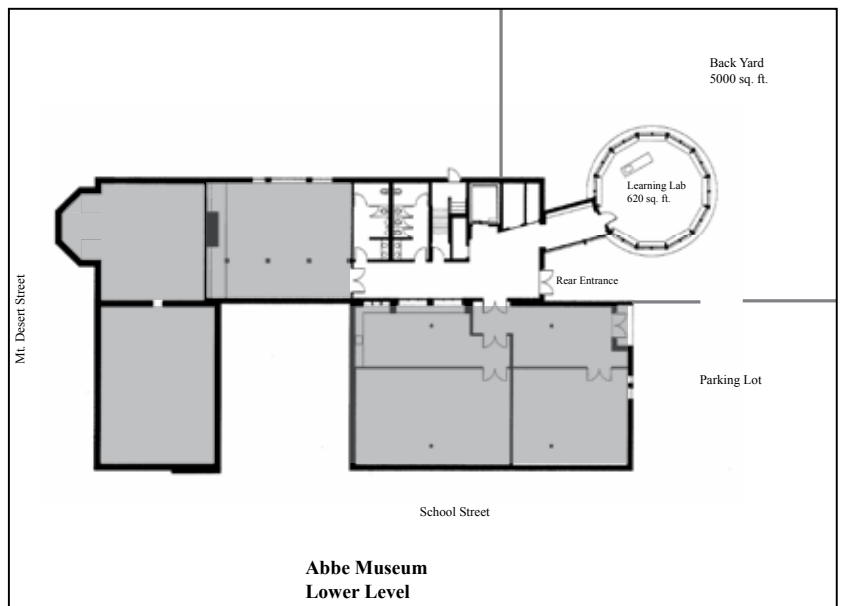
THE ABBE MUSEUM - DOWNTOWN BAR HARBOR

## FACILITIES

**The Abbe currently operates out of two facilities, the original 1928 location at Sieur de Monts inside Acadia National Park and the 2001 downtown facility in Bar Harbor. Interpretive spaces, current and potential, are identified by name and square feet on the floor plans.**



**Abbe Museum  
Main Level**

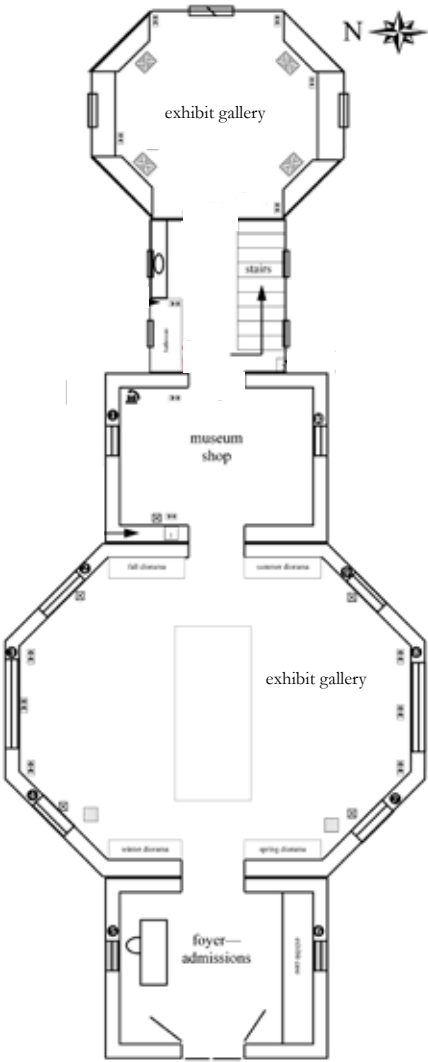


**Abbe Museum  
Lower Level**





SIEUR DE MONTS SPRING - ACADIA NATIONAL PARK



## MOTTO

Wabanaki people - their history and their culture – represent at least a 12,000-year-long experience in their homeland.

## OUR CHARGE AS AN INSTITUTION\*

- Build a respectful and inclusive society.
- Nurture creative thinking and expression to address societal needs.

## OUR CHARGE IN INTERPRETATION

Through exhibits, programs, and other interpretive means, we

- Connect with the visitor's personal history and give him/her new knowledge and experiences that can be applied to human understanding and community world-wide.
- Share the full Wabanaki story.
- Know that working with Native content and consultants requires a WITH and FOR not an ABOUT and TO mindset.

## THE ABBE'S MISSION\*

To inspire new learning about the Wabanaki Nations with every visit.

## THE ABBE'S VISION\*

Each person who connects with the Abbe Museum will be treated to an outstanding experience.

## THE ABBE'S CORE COMPETENCIES\*

- We have access to the world stage.
- We have strong relationships with the Wabanaki tribes.
- The content and the contextual nature of our collections are unparalleled.
- We have beautiful museum spaces.
- We are part of the summer tradition on Mount Desert Island.
- We are a trusted educational resource.

\*established during the strategic planning process of 2009-2010



# THEMES

The Abbe interprets the history and culture of the Wabanaki people, placing emphasis on Wabanaki perspectives and experiences and their context in the world and American history. There are three major content areas encompassing the stories of the Abbe Museum.

## CONTINUITY & CHANGE

- The Wabanaki experience is a 12,000+ year history and this is demonstrated by several lines of evidence, including, but not limited to, archaeology and oral history.
- The Wabanaki live in their homeland and continue to build family and community in New England and Eastern Canada.
- The Native perspective, as told by women and men, on Wabanaki history and culture is a story of unity and complexity.

## ENCOUNTER & CONTACT

- The experience of encounter between cultures was and is both wondrous and violent.
- The contact period initiated a time of oppression and destruction that continues today.
- Cultural survival was and is a deliberate act, guided by Wabanaki leaders and tribal citizens.

## NATIVE VOICE & COLLABORATION

- Native voice as primary voice in exhibits, programs, and events is paramount.
- Native consultants, staff members, trustees, volunteers, and contractors are crucial informants and collaborators.
- Acknowledging and knowing one's own culture and history is key to a better understanding of Wabanaki culture and history.
- Understanding Native sovereignty and the protection of the sacred is essential.

## OUR PERSPECTIVE

Created as an anthropology-focused museum, the Abbe works from a history perspective today. This recognizes native history in a 12,000 year continuum that includes insights from anthropology, archaeology, and ethnology, but is viewed through the history discipline.





## COLLECTING FOCUS

The Abbe's collections include objects spanning 9,000 years of Native American life in Maine. Extensive archaeological collections from coastal and interior Maine include stone and bone tools, pottery, and animal food bones. The museum's non-archaeological collections date back to the late 18th to early 19th centuries. These collections, including birchbark containers and canoes, ash splint and sweetgrass baskets, woodcarvings and beadwork, primarily document the interaction between Wabanaki and non-Native residents and visitors in Maine - objects made for sale, or "tourist art." A very small portion of the non-archaeological collection represents items made and used by Wabanaki people, either historically or in recent years. The Abbe's archival collections primarily document the institutional history of the museum, with a small collection of archival material documenting Wabanaki history and current issues. The museum's research library has maintained a strong focus on Wabanaki culture, history, and archaeology with additional material covering wider topics and issues around Native Americans in general.

## CURRENT COLLECTING PRIORITIES INCLUDE

- Outstanding and innovative contemporary Wabanaki art and fine craft.
- Historical “made for sale” objects which are currently underrepresented in the collection (i.e. beadwork) and that represent important traditions and innovations in Wabanaki art and craft.
- Objects made and used by Wabanaki people that can be used to interpret the daily lives of Native people in Maine, both in the past and today.
- Contemporary fine art, both two- and three-dimensional, by Wabanaki artists.
- Archaeological collections from time periods currently under-represented and well-documented archaeological collections, including the Contact and Early Colonial Period.
- Historical images and documents relating to Wabanaki history.

These priorities remain valid as we move into the future, with additional considerations.

## FUTURE COLLECTING SHOULD

- Be guided by the involvement of Wabanaki people and communities in the work of the Abbe.
- Be strategic and take into account limited storage space for collections.
- Support the interpretation of contemporary, relevant issues for the Wabanaki.
- Provide for the interpretation of the traditional, dynamic and adaptive aspects of everyday life among the Wabanaki to bring a personal connection for our visitors.
- Emphasize archaeological collections that can support a comprehensive and multi-vocal interpretation of pre-Colonial Wabanaki history.
- Include books and other publications presenting relevant new and high-quality scholarship and knowledge about the full spectrum of Wabanaki culture and history.

Additionally, collecting must support our mission and interpretive themes, must be in compliance with all relevant local, state, tribal, national and international laws, statutes and regulations, and be done in a way that is ethical and culturally-appropriate.



## ABBE AS A STATE-WIDE RESOURCE

As the only museum in the world dedicated to collective Wabanaki history and culture and as the primary resource for teachers implementing LD 291, the Wabanaki Initiative, the Abbe has developed connections across the state. Because of our mission, the need for Wabanaki education and our partners' needs, the Abbe has a duty to consider an expansion of our state-wide services and impact.

The Abbe seeks to grow our state-wide visibility through partnerships with other groups such as Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance, Four Directions Development Corp., Maine Office of Tourism, Maine Department of Education, the tribal communities, and more. Through strategic partnerships such as these, the Abbe's mission will be furthered beyond the physical limitations of the buildings in Bar Harbor.

We have a head start on this goal with the current teacher training initiative we launched in 2012, thanks to grant funding from the Institute for Museum and Library Resources. Designed as a collaboration with the Maine Department of Education, new lessons were created by Wabanaki tribal members and Abbe educators, which launched in the fall of 2013. Following the introduction of these new lessons, teacher workshops will be led across the state, introducing educators to these new cross-disciplinary lesson plans and to the overall mandate of LD291. Our goal is to increase the number of teachers and classrooms served, furthering the impact of the Wabanaki Initiative and creating free resources to meet this unfunded mandate.

New lessons will continue to be added as events and resources allow, and teachers will be encouraged to submit their own lessons to share in an educational commons with one another. National partnerships with the National Museum of the American Indian are also being explored.

Through teacher instruction, the Abbe has established one interpretive direction; however, as we implement the interpretive plan, the staff will consider other strategies that strengthen our reach and impact.

## OUR AUDIENCES

Currently, the bulk of our general visitors reside over 120 miles away from the Abbe and visit during the summer and fall seasons. They know very little about the Abbe before they visit. At this time, we lack data about our off-season visitors, but anecdotally we know there is a small increase in regional visitation. And our programs attract year-round and regional residents more than our other audiences.

Abbe audiences are primarily older visitors who enjoy spending time in museums and have an interest in learning more about the Wabanaki. Personal interactions with Wabanaki people and Abbe staff enhance the visitor experience - our audiences are looking for personal connections and interactions from their visits. The more this idea can be folded into how we think about interpretation, the more satisfied our visitors will be.

Local and regional family groups comprise a smaller visitor demographic. Further surveys are needed to better understand how many people with children come to the Abbe and what time of year they are visiting. With this more complete data, we can assess the resources we put into family and children's activities and determine a strategy for either targeting our marketing efforts to this group, or adjusting our internal resources.

In the near future we will begin surveying our audiences in the off-season through an in-house survey. From this data we will be able to market the Abbe better - our exhibits and programs - to regional and local people to increase visitation and strengthen our reputation in the state.

The local and regional year-round population is unwilling to travel to Bar Harbor during peak season, which they often express anecdotally. We have good success attracting regional and local residents for public programs in the off-season, and attendance at programs is increasing.

Targeting people regionally based on key drivers identified in a recent visitor study will help build our visitation and our reputation. Off-season partnerships will also be important for drawing people to Bar Harbor for winter activities, businesses, and other regional attractions during the quiet months. There are more offerings for restaurants, shops, and outdoor activities than there has been in the past, the shoulder season is growing, and a collaborative effort to keep people informed of our activities would be beneficial.

# DESIRED VISITOR EXPERIENCE

The vision of the Abbe makes the visitor our priority – each person who connects with the Abbe Museum will be treated to an outstanding experience. The Abbe is committed to creating an experience for visitors that is engaging, entertaining, and provides opportunities for learning. This means the visitors should:

- Be able to engage in a social experience with fellow visitors, or have the opportunity to enjoy the galleries on their own.
- Draw on their past experiences, memories, and knowledge base to help understand the past and find meaning in Native history and culture.
- Take away concepts from the Abbe for later discussion and reflection.
- Find relevance between elements in the Wabanaki story and their own cultural experience.
- Engage in dialogue with friendly, attentive, and knowledgeable staff, volunteers, and contractors.
- Be educated and entertained.
- Be inspired and enlightened.
- Be curious and ask questions.
- Have opportunities to interact with the exhibits and program leaders.
- Find the Abbe to be a welcoming, clean, comfortable, and safe environment.
- Gain and/or develop an appreciation for culture and history.
- Have fun.

The Abbe provides the staff with professional development opportunities and customer service training to ensure that we provide our visitors with an excellent experience. This means the staff will:

- Greet each visitor with a warm welcome.
- Respect the visitor's current level of knowledge and various learning styles, and through our interpretation take them to new levels of knowledge and understanding.
- Treat visitors of all ages with respect and courtesy, creating a hospitable and friendly environment.
- Help make personal connections between our visitors and the content areas.
- Provide a safe and accessible facility for visitors.
- Create interactive exhibits and programs utilizing the latest audience research, scholarship, accessibility considerations, and cutting edge interpretive techniques.
- Be committed to addressing difficult topics – such as race, genocide, and stereotypes – in a respectful way without sensationalizing, with the goal to encourage visitor conversation and learning.



## ACTIVITIES: SOME WAYS TO INTERPRET

The Abbe Museum needs to grow as a place of activity, attracting significant numbers of visitors and becoming a place of greater community involvement. As we strengthen, we need to be mindful of our changing audiences and their needs. For example, in order to fulfill our mission, the 80% of our audiences who only visit the Abbe once in their lifetime need a more complete representation of Wabanaki history and culture. And, we need to consider and synthesize both museum locations – Sieur de Monts and Downtown – as we communicate our interpretive messages.

Museums have many well-known and proven ways to deliver content and involve the public. A combination of many approaches is necessary for success and it will vary depending on the place, resources, staff, type, and number of visitors. The following are recommended ways to interpret at the Abbe Museum.



## 1. Orientation Exhibits

CURRENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS	AREAS TO ADDRESS
Downtown orientation space is ample and exhibits were installed with its opening in 2001.	Because of changing interpretive needs and changes made over the past five years, the orientation gallery needs to be revised and updated.
An orientation exhibit case was added at Sieur de Monts (SDM) in 2008, which better tied the two facilities together.	Labels need to be refreshed and content updated to align with interpretive framework. Consider how admissions can better function to allow for more effective orientation.
Downtown orientation space is used more for programming than in the past.	Refine interpretive messages, better accommodate the popular canoe, and configure for programming needs (rainy days max the space out).

## 2. Traditional Static Exhibits

CURRENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS	AREAS TO ADDRESS
The timeline introduces the 12,000+ year history, and works backward from 2001.	The timeline kiosk needs to be reactivated and updated.
The timeline serves as a general introduction to Wabanaki history.	The timeline is not sufficient for visitor needs and is demonstrating wear. A new permanent exhibit is needed in the Main Gallery.
<i>Layers of Time</i> engages a variety of audiences and supports a popular school program.	Components of <i>Layers of Time</i> will be integrated into the new permanent exhibit, reflecting our interpretive themes, and the school program will be re-designed to be independent from the exhibit.
SDM exhibits provide iconic memories; a museum of a museum.	Interpretive signage/imagery needs to prepare visitors for the experience and propel them throughout the whole building. Dioramas need updating.
The <i>Circle of Four Directions</i> serves as meaningful space with limited interpretation.	Further interpretation will give visitors a way to connect with material culture and Wabanaki perspective in a consistent way.

### 3. Participatory Exhibits and Programs

CURRENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS	AREAS TO ADDRESS
Exhibit designs typically include hands-on interactive elements and the education team is involved throughout the planning and design phases.	The concept of participation needs to be evaluated and its applications at the Abbe considered.
Program design is consistent and offers a wide variety of topics and speakers.	To date, participatory programs are limited to workshops. The concept of participation needs to be evaluated and its applications at the Abbe considered.
Learning lab consistently offers children interactive space.	Lab needs some in-depth evaluation, followed by potentially significant changes to better integrate with the interpretive experience at the Abbe.

### 4. Educational Programs

CURRENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS	AREAS TO ADDRESS
We offer a diverse, year-round calendar of programs for multiple audiences.	Integrate evaluation strategies to assess effectiveness. Work toward more frequent direct interaction with Native people.
<i>Tea, Popovers and Archaeology</i> is a sold out program each year.	Develop a substitute program should <i>Tea and Pops</i> funding end.

### 5. Changing Exhibits

CURRENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS	AREAS TO ADDRESS
A regular changing exhibit schedule keeps the interpretation fresh for our audiences.	A reduction in changing spaces is needed, for financial sustainability, and will be accomplished with the new permanent exhibit.
Changing exhibits provide an opportunity to deliver current content and incorporate Wabanaki voice.	Develop a structured system to manage that process more effectively.
Traveling exhibits are well received.	Evaluate the use of traveling exhibits, i.e. cost, space requirements, topics, quality.

## 6. Guided Tours

CURRENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS	AREAS TO ADDRESS
Guided tours of the galleries are popular and are provided by appointment.	Develop a daily tour schedule during peak season. Look into delivery of multi-media content.
The Place Names Tour was popular in 2013; this was a first time offering.	Develop more guided experiences across island with goal of offering on a regular basis.



## 7. Self-Guided Visits

CURRENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS	AREAS TO ADDRESS
Way-finding signs in the building are semi-effective.	Need to conduct an overall way-finding assessment of the interior spaces and improve signage as needed.
Gallery guides and maps are offered from time to time.	Develop more effective interior maps to guide visitors throughout the building. Look into delivery of multi-media content.
Acadia National Park (ANP) is adding interpretive signage at SDM by the wigwam and the along the trail to the Abbe.	Develop an updated multi-generational, self-guided activity for SDM.
Currently offer limited multi-lingual translations of Abbe content.	Develop more comprehensive multi-lingual translations for changing exhibits.

## 8. Special Events

CURRENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS	AREAS TO ADDRESS
The Native American Festival and Basketmakers Market promotes interaction and commerce and is regularly held in July.	Evaluate the 2013 experience for success stories/ repeat events and build from there.
Exhibit openings are well planned and typically integrate educational moments.	Develop openings into MUST SEE events.
The Gathering Gala offers content delivery opportunities through auction sales.	Integrate interpretive knowledge more deeply into the Gala experience.

### 9. Outdoor Signage

CURRENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS	AREAS TO ADDRESS
The Museum in the Streets signage program included the downtown location.	Consider an interpretive signage plan that communicates our mission and purpose more clearly.
Improved our visibility through landscaping, banner system, and lit signs.	Make current outside signage consistent with graphic identity.

### 10. Open Storage

CURRENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS	AREAS TO ADDRESS
The design of the lab includes exhibit space, office space, and staff space and is highly effective, giving visitors a behind-the-scenes experience.	Provide virtual access to collections, while standing at the lab window.
Interpretive signage outside of the lab window is instructive.	Provide general interpretive content for projects undergoing analysis.



11. Interactive Lab

CURRENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS	AREAS TO ADDRESS
<p>The lab provides wide-open viewing access so that visitors can learn about collections care.</p>	<p>Develop regular interactive moments when interesting work is going on; develop content for visitors when nothing interesting is going on. Consider overhead camera/scope viewing for use when work is happening.</p>

12. Archaeology Field School

CURRENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS	AREAS TO ADDRESS
<p>Held each summer, the field school is a cross-generational, hands-on experience.</p>	<p>Consider ways to engage the broader public in our archaeological work, especially our adult audiences.</p>
<p>Cultural content is offered through learning experiences during the week.</p>	<p>Work with Native advisors ahead of time to inform the research questions and increase Native participation in the analysis.</p>





### 13. Shop

CURRENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS	AREAS TO ADDRESS
<p>Often the artists who lead demonstrations in our public programs are also represented in the shop. This creates synergy between the Abbe's educational and economic impact.</p>	<p>Develop artist demonstrations within and connected to the shop space.</p>
<p>The shop staff are well-trained and, through basket and other art-form sales, communicate stories about basketmaking.</p>	<p>Create graphic elements to represent the artists' stories and the impact of shop sales.</p>
<p>Product lines connect to exhibits, sometimes.</p>	<p>Featured exhibits are graphically represented in the shop and there are more product lines connected to exhibit themes.</p>

# EVALUATION

The Abbe Museum is committed to an ongoing program of visitor evaluation to strengthen our offerings. When time is at a minimum, we will adapt and create survey strategies to gain at least a small understanding of our educational impact so that we may make informed decisions about future projects and resources. These are our preferred strategies:

- **Visitor Demographics** – Visitor demographics are important as they inform us who is, and who is not, utilizing our resources. By maintaining an ongoing collection of visitor statistics, which includes annual review of the data set and collection tool, we can utilize the information to inform our program development, and compare/contrast the data to show visitation patterns.
- **Outcomes Based Evaluation** – Outcomes based evaluation (OBE) looks at impacts/benefits/changes to our audiences (as a result of our programmatic efforts) during and/or after their participation in Abbe programs. OBE can examine these changes in the short-term, intermediate term and long-term. Using a helpful tool, called a logic model, we will clearly outline these measurements and define the purpose of Abbe mission-driven activity. Introducing OBE as regular interpretive practice is new with this framework, and fortunately, there are numerous online resources to help. Whenever possible, a logic model will accompany exhibits and programs. Due to the Abbe's smaller staff size, streamlining the assessment process is encouraged.
- **Front-end, formative, summative evaluation** – As the Abbe's evaluation bench-strength grows, we will begin integrating sophisticated evaluation techniques in our exhibit and program planning process.
  - Front-end evaluation is about exploring what visitors want to learn or experience in an exhibit or education program. It is done at the beginning of a project, before we've made many content or design decisions.
  - Formative evaluation is about testing the effectiveness and appeal of what we're creating and it is done when things are still in draft, planning, or design stages.
  - Summative evaluation is conducted when the audience can experience the total "package." It often reveals problems that were not, or could not be, identified during the earlier stages of development.



# DESIRED LEARNING OUTCOMES

The Abbe Museum has three desired learning outcomes for visitors as they experience our interpretive methods.

- Visitors will know that for 12,000+ years, Native people continue to live in what is present-day Maine and its surrounding region.
- Visitors will understand that there are multiple voices and resources that inform our knowledge of Wabanaki people, and direct interaction with Native people offers the most impact.
- Visitors will be inspired to engage in a broadened dialogue that considers the indigenous experience on a local and global scale.

# WITH GRATITUDE

Thank you to the Native advisors, staff, trustees, and volunteers who gave their valuable input.

Raney Bench  
Robin Bray  
Chris Buzcko  
Heath Cabot  
Cinnamon Catlin-Legutko  
Julia Clark  
Dru Colbert  
Rebecca Cole-Will  
Darron Collins  
John Dennis  
Linda Dunn  
Ruth Eveland  
Gretchen Faulkner  
Chris Fogg  
Peggy Forster  
James Francis  
Vera Francis  
Gary Friedman  
Tim Garrity  
Chief Richard Getchell  
Todd Graham  
Ann Cox Halkett  
Bill Haviland  
Paige Lilly  
George Neptune  
Dani Meier  
Mary Mitchell  
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Numerous interpretive planning examples and techniques inspired the Abbe Museum's process. We are grateful to these organizations for sharing their work.

Andover Historical Society  
Museum of the Aleutians  
National Park Service  
    Acadia National Park  
    Longfellow National Historic Site  
    Star Spangled Banner National Historic Trail  
    Steamtown National Historic Site  
National Iron and Steel Heritage Museum  
National Museum of Suburbia  
USS Constitution Museum



INSPIRING NEW LEARNING  
ABOUT THE WABANAKI NATIONS  
WITH EVERY VISIT



**Abbe Museum**

IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

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