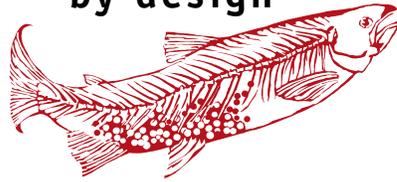


Erica Fielder Studio

interpreting our heritage

by design



since 1983

"What's My Budget?" Checklist

For Outdoor Interpretive Displays, Panels, Kiosks, and Exhibits

Erica Fielder Studio © 2010

Erica Fielder Studio [EFS] put together this Budget Checklist to help you determine an accurate and complete cost for your interpretive panel or outdoor display project.

- **Fabrication:** Why consider fabrication first? If you don't budget adequately for fabrication and stands, you may not be able to pay for a quality design. Estimate how many panels, kiosks, or exhibits you'd like. Consult an interpretive designer who works with outdoor displays, as well as other agencies or departments that have done similar work, to determine what kind of materials you'll use for the signs and bases. Once you've decided on appropriate materials, call at least three fabrication firms to ask them for a description of their panel materials and a ballpark cost for both panel and base. Depending on the cost of your design work, estimate between 20% and 30% of total budget for panel fabrication and stands, not including tax and shipping.
- **Theme Building:** Themes go beyond general topics to determine what messages you'll communicate with your displays. (A topic is "mangrove trees." A theme is "mangrove trees keep our water clean.") Taking time to come up with well-thought-out themes can save an enormous amount of time in the long run and greatly improve the chances that your visitors will get something out of your displays. We encourage you to include your Design Firm in this process if their staff has adequate writing skills.
- **Research:** Do you have complete and up-to-date documentation about your site and the topics your interpretive displays will cover? If not, will you want your Design Firm to do research for you, or does your agency have the resources to do the research within your timeline? Consider the following and budget accordingly so that your interpretive displays convey accurate, interesting, and up-to-date information.

✓ **Content:** Will the Design Firm need to do research for the overall interpretive messages and for the text?

✓ **Illustrations:** Graphics showing historical, botanical, biological, geological, meteorological, or other scientific information will require additional research. Consider whether you have the resources to provide this information in-house, or whether the Design Firm will need to do additional investigation.

✓ **Experts:** Do you have historians, scientists, or other experts who will be able to answer all the questions your Design Firm may have? Include a small budget for scientific/expert consulting.

■ **Text:** If you're building interpretive displays, you have something to tell visitors about your site. Good interpretive text conveys your message and makes a connection between your visitors and your site. Technical, textbook-y, lengthy, or poorly written text will only confuse visitors. Therefore, it's important to budget for having your text professionally done, just as you would graphics. Avoid writing text by committee.

■ **Illustrations:** Original, hand-drawn, or painted illustrations tend to engage visitors longer at a display than do photos or clip art. Such illustrations also deliver a more detailed level of information than photographs. However, illustrations are more expensive than photographs, so get some estimates of how much they will cost. EFS's price schedule gives you a discount based on the number of illustrations you request.

■ **Photographs:** If your project requires photographs, consider the following:

✓ Will your agency provide the photographs, or will your Design Firm take them? (If your agency hires a photographer, make sure the photographer is experienced and can provide high-resolution, professional photos.)

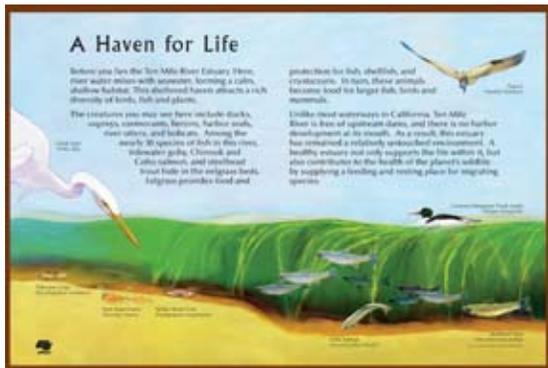
✓ If you have historic photos you plan on using, they may need cleaning and sharpening. (Please do not clean and sharpen them yourself! Let an experienced interpretive design firm do this for you.)

■ **Maps:** Maps are expensive to create and can add to the cost of your project. Check to see whether existing maps are up to date and saved in a digital format (with layers intact) that can be opened by Adobe Illustrator. EFS can help you decide whether your maps will need to be recreated.

■ **Custom or Nonstandard Mounts:** Artistic or otherwise nonstandard frames and pedestals can cost considerably more. However, you can sometimes save money, while reducing the project's environmental impact, by repurposing discarded materials. If your project is on or near the site of a recent demolition or remodeling, look into whether materials might be salvaged for mounting your interpretive displays.

- **Sales Taxes:** State sales taxes will differ depending on how fabrication is purchased. Generally speaking, the Design Firm provides a service that is usually non-taxable, while the Fabricator provides a product that is taxable. Taxes vary considerably from state to state, so find out how your state taxes interpretive projects.
- **Shipping Costs:** The cost of shipping heavy panels and frames will add dollars to your budget. If you need an estimate, ask a reputable interpretive designer to give you one.

Thank you for using this checklist. If you have any questions, or you'd like to suggest additions to the checklist, please don't hesitate to email us at efielder@mcn.org. May all your interpretive projects meet your budgets!



Ten Mile Bridge and Estuary, Mendocino Coast, CA, California Department of Transportation.

Samples of interpretive displays from Erica Fielder Studio. Please visit www.ericafelderstudio.com for more examples.

Point Cabrillo Light House, Sunken Ship Frolic, Mendocino Coast, CA, California Department of Parks and Recreation.

