



ICCF/PNN Exhibit Design Workshop

ICCF ConsCorps Interpretive Team

Tayrona National Natural Park, Colombia

September 8 - 15, 2017

Overview

ICCF's ConsCorps Interpretive team of Sam Vaughn, Carolyn Richard, Ana Cubillos, and Carolina Valbuena joined the Parques Nacionales Naturales de Colombia (PNN) at Tayrona National Natural Park to conduct an exhibit and interpretive media planning and design workshop. The project focused on the Chairama Visitor Center complex, which has been closed for ten years. The workshop provided exhibit design training to 25 people from the national, territorial, Corales del Rosario, Amacayacu, Gorgona and Tayrona park offices. Sessions included a wide range of exhibit design techniques and information presented by ICCF and PNN staff. The workshop concluded successfully with the development of prototypes for three exhibits and one orientation wayside exhibit, including a formative evaluation exhibit review involving another 40 Tayrona park and concession employees.

Additionally, PNN has been able to establish a base team at the national level to develop this type of workshop in national parks that want to develop visitor/interpretive centers.

In this way, the Conservation Corps continues to make progress in achieving the goal, through technical and financial support, of contributing to the improvement in the conditions of the visitor's experience through the renovation of spaces that facilitate orientation, education and interpretation of the heritage of national parks in Columbia.

Background

1. The Chairama Museum in Tayrona PNN was closed approximately 10 years ago. Key problems included unsustainable and difficult to maintain exhibits (no environmental controls in the building) as well as the use of sacred objects not supported by the indigenous people of the park. The park would like to reopen this building as a visitor center (or interpretive center) and need new exhibits designed for the space.



The closed Chairama complex has great potential for the park as a visitor center and public plaza.

2. September 2015 -- ICCF participated in a PNN workshop on theme development at Tayrona, helping staff to develop interpretive text versus more complex, scientific statements. This theme development was critical pre-exhibit work to the current workshop focused on design.
3. April 2016 -- ICCF participated in a training workshop for park staff. ConsCorps and park staff visited the Zaino's entrance area to observe and evaluate how the park's messages were being delivered through a variety of communication tools, such as signs, induction talk and video. Then issues and opportunities were identified to improve the visitor experience through information, orientation and interpretation messages delivered through talks, signs, as well as in the ticket zone, police control point, stables zone, parking lot, "Chairama area, first camping zone, "Kogui" trailhead and Ecohab area.



Natural history and cultural history themes for this special park.

4. May 2017 -- ICCF helped PNN with an Interpretive Plan workshop for Tayrona. This workshop was key in confirming thematic statements, as well as for introducing staff to the idea of planning the best locations and media to present different themes.
5. August 2017 -- ConsCorps and PNN met in Bogota to prepare the agenda for the exhibit design workshop to assure success in September, trying to put into seven days the exhibit process from schematic layout to creation of mock exhibits (a key goal for PNN).



Exhibit Design work.

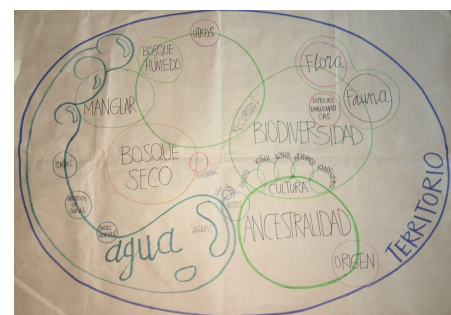
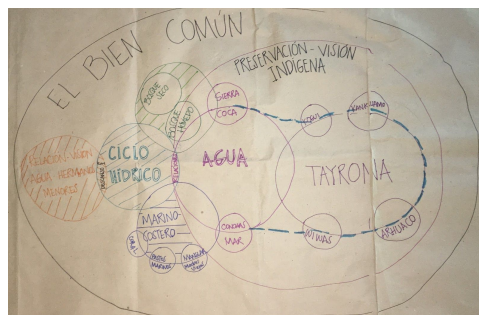
Successes

Juliana Hoyos from the PNN Sub-Direction of Sustainability and Environmental Businesses, served as the workshop leader, assisted by Fernanda Del Pino of PNN Education. The workshop began with an overview of good quality exhibits from various perspectives, including design, sustainability, communication effectiveness, and attractiveness to visitors. Carolyn Richard presented a session on typical functions included in visitor centers in National Park Service (NPS) areas, as well as an explanation of the use of bubble diagrams to move from initial function layout to final draft schematic layout. Sam Vaughn presented sessions on what we have learned from evaluating visitor center exhibits over 40 years; and tips on how to create exhibits that are successful both from visitors' perspectives (interesting, enjoyable, easily understood) as well as from the park's perspective (thematic, sustainable, effective communication).

Key topics covered included:

- Develop a quality visitor experience that coordinates entry through exit experiences within the visitor center complex to serve as a launching point into the park visit.
- When thinking about exhibits, it's often helpful to view possible exhibits from a visitor's perspective in addition to park staff's perspective.

- Determine visitor center functions that are highly important. Services the Chairama complex could provide include welcome, orientation/information, interpretation, media, bookstore/gift shop, and visitor services such as restrooms.
- VC planning should consider future needs, possible trends, changes in visitation or resource conditions.
- Architectural considerations are vital for VC renovations.
- Space is often scarce; design should consider possible crowding/bottlenecks, etc.
- Accessibility can include tactile maps or exhibits. There are many options for visual, auditory, cognitive, and other visitor experiences.
- Don't think only inside the box (meaning the walls of the building); also consider use of the area surrounding the visitor center.
- Design sustainable exhibits that can handle use and last over time.
- Pick different media types (panels, video, interactive, etc.) based on the ability of different media to meet different exhibit needs, such as displaying complex messages (e.g., geology timeline) to more visual displays (ecosystems).
- Use exhibits wisely that contain moving parts, are interactive, or have high-tech components, since they are expensive and often hard to maintain.
- Most visitors prefer less text; graphics, photographs and other exhibit elements should help tell the stories clearly and compellingly.
- Use bubble diagrams during the first stages of design planning to provide a creative, flexible framework in which to experiment with key function locations, including orientation, interpretation, visitor services, etc.
- The workshop also reviewed and discussed the landscape proposal presented in May 2017 by ICCF's Russell and Maitte, and PNN's Sergio.



Bubble diagram work using content (not functions)

The workshop began with these initial training sessions, then moved into creating exhibit content to meet Juliana's workshop goals for prototype development. Three teams formed, each team designing and constructing a prototype for one of the park themes/topics: how water cycles through the park and supports natural and human life in this ecosystem; indigenous people who lived and are living in and around the park; and biodiversity in the park's ecosystems. In addition, Carolyn and Sam created a 3-sided orientation wayside proposed for outside the visitor center as people exit the shuttle vehicles.

One of the best things Juliana included in the workshop was an evaluation by 40 park and concession staff members who shared their thoughts on content and design on the prototype exhibits. This was a rewarding event, one too rarely experienced even in the NPS, but extremely valuable for gaining feedback from park staff before exhibits are constructed and installed. What a great learning experience and a great end to the workshop.



At the end of the workshop, a formative evaluation was completed by 40 park and concession employees.

Challenges

In a 7-day workshop, it would be impossible to share complete details on all the steps usually necessary for planning and designing exhibits, from the initial project development in a context of general management and interpretive planning, through fund-raising strategies, editing design work, fabrication and installation. An overview of planning and design processes was provided. It is recognized that PNN is trying to follow a shorter process and timeframe for developing exhibits that take full advantage of PNN staff versus hiring more-expensive private exhibit designers. There will be some advantages and cost savings in this approach, with future work needed to determine those steps where professional exhibit designers should be involved to assure a satisfactory final product.

A priority for Juliana was creating prototype exhibits to help demonstrate to the park and other administrative layers of the PNN system examples of what was planned for the Chiarama complex, and this was successfully accomplished. Schematic design, production-ready drawings, interpretive exhibit writing, and the challenges for steps such as image acquisition will need to be dealt with in the future. The core steps of exhibit planning and design were covered during the workshop. The compressed workshop did not provide time for everything, including assignment of functions within the Chiarama space, spatial relationships, and discussions on future options for project completion.



Exhibit design work in progress.

Milestones

I. Development of Interpretive Media Plan and Design for Chairama VC

These seven days produced the outlines of a plan and design for the Tayrona Chairama Visitor Center. This vision incorporates several years of planning and involvement at all levels. It's a good initial plan and overall design, with the right preparations to move ahead.

II. Exhibit Planning and Design Training

The PNN staff brought to the training were well chosen. People from parks with upcoming exhibit projects (Corales del Rosario, Amacayacu, Gorgona and Tayrona) were included, as well as the territory and national office staff who will be critical for assuring the support and financial resources needed for large exhibit projects are available. In addition, national office staff who will be key to success in developing designs also participated in the workshop. This workshop is intended to be a prototype for future visitor center and interpretive media planning and design projects.

III. Formative Evaluation

Having the park staff complete a formative review of the prototype exhibits was a great component to include. Workshop participants heard the questions and comments from park staff not involved in the design workshop. The value of formative evaluations was clear to all participants of the workshop.

Conclusion and Next Steps

The workshop succeeded in sharing NPS design experiences and providing an introduction to visitor center and interpretive media planning and design. The PNN and ICCF ConsCorps teams provided an introduction to exhibit planning and design, and helped to create options for the Chairama visitor center complex. PNN staff are creative and skilled in working with the resources available to accomplish goals, and are very positive and forward looking. When funding becomes available, a professional exhibit designer will probably be necessary to complete the design of this extensive exhibit project. If donors become part of this project, a professional exhibit designer can be included when PNN is ready to finance, design and complete an exhibit project.

Next steps will include completion of planning and design concepts for the building, “micro-zonification” of the Chairama complex, cost estimates, landscape planning and design, and business and operations planning.

An initial step needed will be to complete drawings of the quality needed for a successful fundraising effort. This may be possible using Bogotá PNN staff, which also helps to ensure buy-in from the national office. However, there is concern about adding to the staff's already-full workload. From the ICCF Interpretation Team perspective, if the goal is to help PNN achieve their dream of redoing the Chairama Visitor Center, ICCF will need to help create fundraising materials that cover the design and construction of the Chiarama complex, including exhibits.

Thanks to this workshop, PNN has now defined the direction they will go for the Chiarama exhibit project. Funding is needed for final design and fabrication documents, construction, as well for an endowment fund to sustainably maintain the complex. Completion of the Chiarama Visitor Center complex will greatly improve the visitor experience at Tayrona PNN by providing a quality orientation and interpretive experience highlighting the park for visitors beginning their discovery of this amazing resource.



Though there are always multiple ways to do exhibit design work, one definite fact is that a team approach is best!