

Reclamation Manual

Directives and Standards

- Subject:** Visitor Centers
- Purpose:** Prescribes requirements and responsibilities for the Bureau of Reclamation. The benefits of this Directive and Standard (D&S) are that everyone will know who is responsible for interpretation and education responsibilities within Reclamation, the goals of interpretation are established, and approval requirements for new visitor centers are clearly specified.
- Authority:** Reclamation Act of 1902, as amended and supplemented; Randolph Sheppard Act of 1936 (Public Law 74-732); Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1964 (Public Law 88-578); Federal Water Project Recreation Act of 1965, as amended (Public Law 89-72); National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665); Architectural Barriers Act of 1968; Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Public Law 93-112); National and Community Service Act of 1990 (Public Law 101-610); Energy and Water Development Appropriations Act of 1990 (Public Law 101-101-Volunteer Program); American's with Disabilities Act of 1990 (Public Law 101-336); Sundry Civil Appropriations Act of 1992 (Public Law 66-389); Reclamation Projects Authorization Act of 1992 (Public Law 102-575); Educate America Act of 1994 (Public Law 103-227); Hoover Dam Miscellaneous Sales Act of 2000 (Public Law 106-461); Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act of 2004 (Public Law 108-477); Department of the Interior Volunteer Recruitment Act of 2005 (Public Law 109-125); 43 Code of Federal Regulations 17, subparts B and E; Department of the Interior Manual, Part 471 (Audiovisual Media and Publications), Chapter 3 (Production and Use of Exhibits).
- Approving Official:** Director, Office of Program and Policy Services
- Contact:** Land Resources Office, 84-53000
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1. **Scope.** This D&S applies to all Reclamation-managed visitor centers, regardless of their source of funding, size, location, regional significance, or anticipated visitation; and includes exhibits, displays, signage, and supporting material such as publications and videos.
2. **Definitions.**
 - A. **Visitor Center.** A visitor center is a public educational facility or dedicated space within a building for interpretive displays, programs, services, and information. Visitor centers generally have support facilities and conveniences for the traveling public.

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B. **Interpretation.** Interpretation is a combination of educational activities designed to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of presentations, original objects, firsthand experience, graphic illustrations, activities, or media designed to help people understand, appreciate, and care for the natural and cultural environment.

C. **Donations.**

- (1) For purposes of this D&S, the term “donation” includes gifts and refers to something of value received from an outside source without consideration or an exchange of value. Funds or other items received as a result of a competitively awarded grant from a foundation are also covered by the term “donation.”
- (2) The following is not considered a donation and, therefore, not included in the definition: in-kind services or contributions in which the entity providing the service or contribution is receiving a benefit in exchange for the service or contribution, or is required pursuant to a cost-share or other agreement or requirement to provide the service or contribution.

3. **Responsibilities.**

A. **Chief of Public Affairs.** The Chief of Public Affairs has oversight responsibility for the coordination and approval of exhibits, publications, audiovisual materials, and other materials throughout Reclamation. See Reclamation Manual Directives and Standards, Audiovisual, Multimedia, Still Photography, and Related Equipment (ADM 05-01). The Chief of Public Affairs will:

- (1) Ensure that all messages in the visitor center are consistent with Reclamation and the Department of the Interior policy.
- (2) Review the master plan; other supporting documentation; DI-551 (Audiovisual Authorization Request), if needed; and DI-552 (Exhibit Production Authorization Request) for each visitor center to ensure it meets the goals and objectives of Reclamation identified in Reclamation Manual Policy, Visitor Centers (LND P13). If it does meet these goals and objectives, the Chief of Public Affairs will sign the DI-551 and DI-552.
- (3) Maintain a file of the DI-551s and DI-552s throughout Reclamation.

B. **Regional Public Affairs Officers.** The regional public affairs officers have oversight responsibility for the coordination and approval of exhibits, publications, and other materials throughout their region. They will:

- (1) Ensure that the provisions contained within this D&S are followed.

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(2) Review the master plan, other supporting documentation, DI-551, and DI-552 for each visitor center to ensure it meets the goals and objectives identified in LND P13. If approved, forward the materials to the Chief of Public Affairs.

(3) Maintain a file of all the visitor center master plans and DI-551 and DI-552 of visitor centers throughout their region.

C. **Reclamation Directors, Area Office Managers, and Supervisors.** All Reclamation directors, area office managers, and supervisors are responsible for ensuring that all offices and personnel are familiar with and follow the provisions of this D&S and Reclamation's Visual Identity Program Online Manual.

4. **Planning.**

A. Each visitor center must have a master plan that addresses the visitor center facilities and program requirements, including compliance with accessibility standards. The master plan must address each of the items listed below and be approved by the regional security officer, regional public affairs officer, and the Chief of Public Affairs.

(1) An inventory and analysis of current visitors and projected visitation levels;

(2) An inventory and analysis of existing resources to be interpreted in the visitor center;

(3) The layout of the visitor center;

(4) Interpretive themes and goals and a description of the method that will be used to achieve effective communication;

(5) Detailed recommendations for proposed interpretive exhibits and programs (universally accessible for persons with mobility, hearing, speech, sight, or cognitive disabilities);

(6) A staffing plan to operate the visitor center, taking into consideration whether, and how, volunteers will be used;

(7) Equipment needed to support exhibits and programs;

(8) Budget required for operation and management;

(9) Use of fees, if authorized;

(10) Any partnerships supporting the visitor center;

(11) Visitor center review schedules; and

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- (12) Security measures and procedures at the visitor center, including any necessary physical and technical upgrades.
 - B. During the planning process for developing or renovating a visitor center, compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), the National Environmental Policy Act, and other applicable environmental laws and regulations is required, as applicable. NHPA compliance will include consideration of effects to any archaeological sites and effects to existing buildings and structures.
 - C. The design of all elements for visitor centers will comply with Reclamation's Visual Identity Program Online Manual.
 - D. Museum property used in visitor center operations, interpretation, and outreach must be managed according to standards promulgated in Departmental Manual Part 411, and 36 Code of Federal Regulations Part 79.
5. **Visitor Center Information.**
- A. **Objectives.**
 - (1) A visitor center operation can be a necessary and integral part of total project management. The primary purpose of a visitor center is to provide interpretive and educational information to the visiting public (including those with physical, sensory, and cognitive impairments) about the mission of Reclamation, the project and its facilities, visitor security and safety, the geographic area where the project is located, and the cultural and natural resources of the area. Visitor centers provide the necessary information for visitors to have a safe and enjoyable visit. Exhibits and other interpretive communications must be designed to stimulate interest and convey information. The interpretive objectives of visitor centers are to:
 - (a) Enhance the public's understanding of Reclamation and its contribution to the Nation;
 - (b) Enhance the public's understanding of the history, purpose, and operation of the project and its archaeological, historical, humanmade, natural, and cultural features;
 - (c) Develop public appreciation for the proper and safe use of project resources;
 - (d) Foster the spirit of personal stewardship of public lands;
 - (e) Orient the visitor to the project and its recreational opportunities; and
 - (f) Aid project personnel in accomplishing management objectives.

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B. Presentation of Information.

- (1) Reclamation will provide routine, non-sensitive information regarding its projects, recreation opportunities, and cultural and natural resources to the public at visitor centers located at dams and other projects in the western United States. If available, this information will be provided to visitors in alternative formats to accommodate the needs of persons with disabilities. Consideration will be given to the information being communicated when determining effective formats to be developed and used to communicate with the public.
- (2) The visitor center and equipment used in relation to it, both inside the visitor center and on the surrounding grounds, are subject to the highest standards of maintenance. All equipment used in visitor centers must be selected for dependability, ease of maintenance, accessibility, longevity, and low operating cost. For equipment that is critical to the visitor's experience, a backup must be on hand, if possible.
- (3) Audio and visual equipment purchased or upgraded must be highly dependable, fully accessible, off-the-shelf equipment that can be easily and cost effectively maintained, repaired, or replaced. See Reclamation Manual Directives and Standards, Audiovisual, Multimedia, Still Photography, and Related Equipment (ADM 05-01). All such equipment procured with Federal funds must meet the technical requirements of section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, to provide for the needs of persons with disabilities.

C. Approvals.

- (1) Before updating or developing a visitor center and before committing any public funds, a DI-552, will be submitted through the regional public affairs officer to the Chief of Public Affairs. The master plan and any other supporting documentation and approval forms will be submitted along with the DI-552.
- (2) The Chief of Public Affairs will review the DI-552 and coordinate with the Department of the Interior on any necessary approvals.
- (3) If approved, work will proceed on developing a design, including the use of graphics and text.
- (4) Before the construction of any display panels, the proposed text and graphics will be submitted through the regional public affairs officer to the Chief of Public Affairs. The Chief of Public Affairs will review the proposed text and graphics and coordinate with the Department of the Interior on any necessary approvals.
- (5) If the proposed text and graphics are approved, development and construction of the necessary elements may proceed.

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6. **Reviews.**

- A. Visitor centers and their exhibits will be formally reviewed once every 5 years. The regional director or delegate will form an external team to conduct this formal review. The external review will be conducted and documented by an interdisciplinary team of technical specialists who are not employees of the office directly responsible for managing the visitor center and who have the appropriate qualifications to conduct such a review. Using contract employees is encouraged for the interpretation part of the inspection.
 - B. The purpose of the review is to ensure that all facilities are safe, secure, accessible, and adequate; equipment is in operating condition; and audiovisual presentations, photographs, taped messages, and other interpretive materials are accurate, current, and communicated effectively. The review team will prepare a report that details its findings, including any recommendations for facility improvements or repairs or for updating exhibits. A copy of this report will be provided to the visitor center manager, area manager, regional director, regional public affairs officer, Chief of Public Affairs, regional security officer, and other appropriate individuals within Reclamation.
 - C. The official directly responsible for managing the visitor center will be responsible for determining what actions to take, in consultation with the regional office and review team, as a result of the review.
 - D. If the external review identifies operational or administrative deficiencies, a timetable in which to correct these deficiencies will be established by the office directly responsible for the visitor center and will be approved by the regional director or delegate.
7. **Fees.** Fees will be charged, if appropriate and authorized, for use and entry into the visitor center.
8. **Items for Sale to the Public.** Items made available to the public may be sold, where authorized. Examples of appropriate sale items include project memorabilia, educational materials, maps, food and beverages, film, and other customary supplies to support a safe and enjoyable recreation visit.