Wayfinding and Signage in Library Design. 2003. This material has been created by Alice Beneicke, Jack Biesek, and Kelley Brandon. It is provided through the Libris Design Project [http://www.librisdesign.org/], supported by the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act, administered in California by the State Librarian. Any use of this material should credit the authors and funding source.
Contributors.................................................................20
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1. **INTRODUCTION**

Libraries are one of the oldest, most traditional building types and consequently use one of the most familiar wayfinding systems. Almost everyone has visited a library, looked for a book, used an online catalogue, talked to a librarian, worked at a study carrel, or placed a book on reserve. Most people are familiar with how libraries operate, and to some degree, how the building activities are organized. Ironically, it is this familiarity and the resulting expectations that often present challenges to intuitive wayfinding in the modern library.

2. **THE NATURE OF WAYFINDING AND SIGNAGE**

Wayfinding is the methodology of arranging indicators to guide people to their destinations. Signs are tools that aid in wayfinding. Architectural indicators such as light, color, materials, and pathways also play a large role in wayfinding. A successful wayfinding program is intuitive and self-navigable, and it protects the overall visual integrity of the site. Wayfinding is specific to its place and visitors.

Signs improve and are most times integral to a clearly designed wayfinding program. The function of a sign is to identify, inform, direct, honor, restrict or permit. A good sign system recedes into the background while providing clear information when needed.

In addition, sign codes, life safety issues and disabled access guidelines need to be included to meet national and state requirements. Successfully designed signage helps visitors find their way, makes information accessible, provides an enhanced experience and honors donor recognition. In addition, an inclusive assessment of the environment and issues that affect orientation for first time visitors is imperative to a successful signage and wayfinding program.

3. **PRINCIPLES OF WAYFINDING**

People tend to use landmarks, entry portals and pathways to help orient themselves and navigate public spaces. Most buildings have clearly designed pathways to destinations. In complex environments and when floor plans are discontinuous or confusing, signage may not always be sufficient. The following principles can help visitors navigate large environments:

**Site Logic**

The apparent logic of how a group of buildings or spaces is arranged affects the user's ability to understand and to be properly oriented in the environment. Visual dominance of entrances, definition of public space from private space and the ability to visually separate one functional zone from another, all play an important role in navigating the space.
**Systems**

Systems of organization are a key component of wayfinding in the library. The naming, numbering and general organization of the site and the parts of a building are essential aspects of a wayfinding plan. Geographic zones, building and floor numbering, dedicatory names versus common names, departmental names, stall numbering and room numbering must be carefully considered. Clear, logical hierarchies must exist to help users remember and use the nomenclature. The classification system should be explained in some form near the entrance to any area organized in this way. Making the public self-sufficient is a step toward a more efficient use of staff.

**Orientation**

Directory maps (also called “You Are Here” maps or locator maps) showing the location of parts of the collection are very useful to orient patrons and allow them to search without assistance. Simple diagrams are best, showing only enough detail to allow patrons to navigate to the general area. Inexpensive digital prints in full color can be made and updated as changes are needed. *You Are Here* maps should be easy to read and oriented to the direction of the reader. That is, the field of view ahead should match the map orientation and provide simple floor plan drawings as shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1 DIRECTIONAL SIGNAGE: FLOOR DIRECTORY AND ROOM NUMBERS**

![Diagram of third floor directory with signs and room numbers](image)
**Sign Elements**

A clear, organized set of sign elements can be the most cost-effective solution to wayfinding improvements in an existing building. Related graphic devices such as wall and floor graphics, strategic placement of sculpture, art programs and computerized information kiosks are all potential elements in a successful wayfinding plan.

**Visitor’s Abilities**

People using the environment bring with them unique abilities, limitations, and memories about navigating, which must be accommodated by the wayfinding plan. Special needs populations, cultural and ethnic minorities and the elderly all must be able to use the facility with minimum assistance. The number of repeat visitors, sight and mobility limitations and whether the facility is new or a renovation must be taken into account when developing a wayfinding plan.

When possible, words should be used that translate as literal cognates in more than one language, such as "Toilet" or "Restaurant", which are similar in English and French. Words which share a common Latin or Greek root in several related languages can often be "decoded" by non-English speaking users without the need for a second language.

Care must be taken not to expect too much from the use of symbols. Symbols work best
when supported by clear wording. When symbols are used as a way to communicate to non-English speaking patrons, consider using limited foreign language on some of the signs.

Color codes are useful supplements to a good linguistic format but should not be the primary means of distinguishing parts of a facility. For example, levels or areas of a facility can be given a color to support a number or letter; the color will help to fix the code in the users’ memory but should not be "required" to understand how the facility is organized. Colors must be chosen for wide recognition, and color-blindness must be taken into account.

**FIGURE 3: TYPICAL OVERHEAD SIGNAGE**

Characters and numbers on signs shall be appropriately sized according to the viewing distance from which they are to be read.

**Consistency**

**3.1.1 Public Information**

All public information such as brochures, mailers, manuals, and handouts become part of the users’ information on how to use the environment. All forms of public information must be consistent in their representation of facility in order for communication to be clear; published maps must agree with facility maps, driving instructions must agree with
how the facility is accessed.

3.1.2 Directional Informational
Directions given by staff are an essential part of the users’ environmental influences. An explanation of how the signs and other wayfinding devices are intended to work can help staff give clearer, more useful directions. Training sessions, which teach proper nomenclature, how to assess special needs and direction-giving, contribute to a comprehensive wayfinding plan.

3.1.3 Current Usage
Terms used in a wayfinding system must be recognizable in common, everyday usage. These terms must be understandable to people who are not familiar with the particular technical or organizational functions of the facility. An example of such an adaptation is the term, *Card Catalogue*, which was eventually replaced with *Online Catalogue*. The change was accepted because libraries in general were recognizing all the new digital resources and a new descriptive term was needed to unify these resources.

**FIGURE 4: ROOM SIGNAGE**

Permanent signage to be installed on the wall adjacent to the latch side of the door. Mounting location must allow a person to approach without encountering protruding objects or standing within the swing path of the door.

3.1.4 Cross Reference
Whether it is the name of a building, the name of a function or the description of a
process, when a word is used anywhere in the system, its meaning must be exactly the
same. If one of the levels of a parking garage below an office building is called Level 3, it
should not also be called Floor 3. All names and nomenclature for parts of the collection
that are listed in the online catalogue should match those commonly used on the signs. If
the catalogue refers to a collection as Young Adult, and the signs label it Juvenile, confusion will result.

3.1.5 Grammar and Spelling
Simple, direct declarative statements should be used. Foreign spellings, acronyms and
other non-standard abbreviations should be avoided. Capital letters, hyphens, slashes,
dashes, apostrophes and other forms of punctuation should be used in a logical and
consistent manner.

4. THE ROLE OF A DESIGN CONSULTANT

Evaluating the Need for a Design Consultant

Typically, the architect will specify a minimal amount of code-required signage as part of
the construction package and the general contractor will provide these signs as part of
their contract obligations. This group of signs will only meet the minimum code
requirements, and will not provide adequate signs to guide the library patron properly. A
complete list of all the signs that are typically needed in a library is provided in the
Appendix; these are substantially more in type and number than basic code signage. A
comprehensive signage system is an essential component of any well-designed library,
and this system must be developed as an integral part of a library design.

For libraries larger than 20,000 square feet or involving a multi-story building, a design
consultant may be required to create such a comprehensive signage system. A building
that has a dedicatory component usually requires a design specialist with experience in
donor recognition. Smaller projects of less than 20,000 square feet generally may be
simple enough for librarians to work directly with a sign vendor, provided the
architectural setting is straightforward and that the signage can be simple and direct.
However, for overall quality and consistency, a design consultant is generally
recommended for library projects of all sizes.

Typically, a design consultant will either work for the library client directly or, in the
case of a new or renovated building, for the project architect as a sub-consultant. The
latter arrangement encourages a successful design coordination of signs and architectural
components.

Criteria for a Design Consultant

A Request for Proposal (RFP) for project-specific signage design services is a proven
method to locate an experienced design consultant. The RFP should spell out goals of the
project and begin to define tasks, timelines and budget requirements. If a budget is not yet established, the first task should be defined to develop a signage budget. The information in Section 5 below, The Design Process, can be used to outline the requirements in the RFP.

5. THE DESIGN PROCESS

While each project varies in size, complexity, budget, schedule, team and services, a similar process can be followed.

Design Planning Phase: Preparing for Design

The planning phase involves a general assessment of the project requirements, assembling a team and determining a preliminary budget, schedule and procurement method.

5.1.1 Project Assessment

New construction provides an opportunity to develop a comprehensive sign program and a budget that can be included in the project construction costs. The first step is to carry out a comprehensive needs assessment of general signage issues and to identify examples of successful solutions. As a result of this needs assessment, an itemized list of sign types will assist in the planning and preparation for the design process. If it is possible to assemble unit costs for sign fabrication and installation, a preliminary budget can be established.

Renovation and remodelling projects pose a different set of challenges for signage. Determining which signs to keep and which ones to replace can often be difficult. Remodelling can provide an opportunity to walk through an existing facility to evaluate the success and failures of current signage and to determine whether the current signage theme can be partially retained – or if an entirely new sign system is needed.

5.1.2 Project Team

The Project Team for the design of a signage system consists of the Library Team, or the user group, the design consultant, and the project architect. The Library Team can include a library planner, a library operations representative, an accessibility coordinator, and a purchasing agent. If there is a donor recognition component, the fundraising coordinator should also be included. The team should also include the person who will become the sign system manager, who will have the responsibility to order new signs and expand or update the system after the library opens.

The following sub-sections conclude with a summary of the separate responsibilities of each of the above project team members during the pre-design Planning Phase and the subsequent design phases.
5.1.3 Sign Budget Forecasting and Planning

As a first step in the pre-design planning phase, a project budget should be developed and various samples of sign products should be acquired. A budget forecast can be prepared as soon as architectural floor plans are available, preferably before the architectural design work is finalized so that the signage can be well-integrated with the architectural design. It is prudent to include the signage budget as a line item in the construction or furnishing budget since sign products can add over $2 per square foot to the overall project cost. Remodels vary, as the cost of merging a new sign system with an old system presents challenges that are unique to each project.

5.1.4 Preliminary Schedule

As noted above, a design consultant can work with the project architect during the design development phase in order to integrate the signage system into the architecture. For example, having a primary building identification sign with letters carved into a stone facade, or providing lighting for a primary architectural sign may require the architect to adjust the architectural drawings to accommodate these signage elements. If this work is not included in the architect’s drawings, it will often be expensive and time consuming to try to add this detail later.

Normally, six to twelve months should be allowed in order to plan, design, procure, fabricate and install a large-scale sign program. Depending on the size of the building, four to twelve weeks should be allowed to program sign locations and develop messages for all signs. An additional four to twelve weeks will be required to design the signs, although some of this work can overlap with programming. To procure the signs, several weeks will be required for competitive bidding, while one week will be sufficient if a particular vendor has been pre-selected. Finally, an additional six to twelve weeks will be needed for the sign fabrication and installation.

Library Team: Items to Plan For:

The Design Planning Phase involves a general assessment of the project requirements, assembling a team and determining a preliminary budget, schedule and procurement method:

- Each kind of sign required for the project (see Sign Planning Checklist in the Appendix.)
- Approximate quantities for each sign type.
- A sketch or written description of each sign type, which can be used to request individual and unit sign pricing from a sign manufacturer.
- A general timeline for the project; this may affect production and pricing.

Items to Expect of the Design Consultant:

- Assistance with sign budget forecasting and planning.
Design Programming Phase: Determining Signage Requirements

The Design Programming Phase involves research and analysis of the site, finding solutions to wayfinding issues, identifying a hierarchy of sign types and determining the location and message of all signs. In addition to sign types identified on the checklist, signs that can aid with operational structure should also be considered. For example, the strategic placement and content of signs can reduce staff interruptions from visitors.

Flexible signs that need to be changed or updated frequently should also be identified. Some flexible sign types are stack ends, event boards, some directories and workstation ID signs for rotating staff. For larger or more complicated libraries, workshops or interviews with various staff can be organized to gain a solid understanding of departmental needs. Questionnaires can also be a useful tool.

**Library Team: Items to Plan For:**

- Provide design consultant with comprehensive understanding of goals, challenges and operations of facility.
- Proofread and approve sign messages and locations.

**Items to Expect of the Design Consultant:**

- A series of meetings, workshops and or interviews with key staff to gather information.
- A summary of information gathered from research.
- A set of floor plans locating each sign and a message schedule that indicates the text or “message” for each sign.
- A preliminary cost estimate.

Design Development Phase: Creating a System of Sign Components

Many signs in a library require a flexible component for changeable information, and these changes and updates will normally be carried out by an assigned staffperson. During the design phase then, the design consultant should develop a template that is easy to use and compatible with existing software (see Figure 3).

Once the general requirements of the program have been identified, the design consultant will start to develop the “look and feel” of the signage. Usually, a few options or design directions will be presented. Specifications of color palette, materials, and typefaces should be indicated at this stage of the design process.

As a practical matter, sign materials should be easy to clean and resistant to fingerprints and smudging. Samples or prototypes with actual materials and finishes can be used to test proposed sign components. The librarians, the architect, the facility manager and the design consultant should be in agreement on the style, theme and placement of signs. Once the design direction is approved, then it can be applied uniformly to each sign type.
Library Team: Items to Plan For

- Review work of design consultant for compliance with program requirements

Items to Expect of the Design Consultant:

- Full size prints or paper mock-ups of sign types.
- Testing key signs to ensure their legibility from relevant distances.
- Verification that all signs meet functional and code requirements.
- A revised cost estimate to verify that design specifications are within budget goals.

**FIGURE 5 FLEXIBLE STACK END: TEMPLATES FOR STANDARD LETTER 8.5" X 11" PAPER.**

CLOSE UP OF SIGN.  **4 UP** each 4.25" x 5.5" actual size.  **6 UP** each 2.82" x 5.5" actual size.

The changeable inserts for stack ends should work within increments of paper sizes currently used. The best size is standard letter (8.5" x 11") format that can easily feed through your printer. Above are examples of stack end ranges 4 and 6 up on a standard letter size page. This same method can work for other flexible signs.

Design Documentation Phase: Developing a Detailed Specification

This next phase includes documentation of the sign system suitable for bidding, fabricating and installing signs, as well as criteria for reordering of signs in the future. These *contract documents* require a significant amount of detail and data via specifications and drawings, and are also known as the *bid documents*. These documents become the legal contract required to purchase signs. Many designers call these “design intent” drawings and require “shop drawings” to be provided by the sign fabricator. *Shop Drawings* define in detail how the signs will be made by the successful bidder, and must be carefully reviewed before formal approval.

Library Team: Items to Plan For:

- Review work of design consultant for compliance with program requirements.
• Pre-qualify bidders and select a sign fabricator.

**Items to Expect of the Design Consultant:**

• Assistance with the selection of a sign fabricator.

• A thorough bid set of construction documents, including specifications for sign products, sign content organized in schedule form, sign location plans, sign typography and symbols, and the sign system color schemes.

**Sign Fabrication and Installation: Quality Assurance**

The fabrication process begins once the Library Team has approved the construction documents and a sign fabricator has been selected. At the outset of the work, the fabricator will develop a production schedule, and will produce shop drawings and prototypes for the proposed signage system elements. A black and white paper print out of each sign, typically called a plotter proof or a layout proof, can be requested of the fabricator, which allows a final opportunity to proofread all names and copy.

The final review of a project is called a *punch list review*. This inspection of the final work provides an opportunity to see the final work in place and to require changes to substandard installations.

**Library Team: Items to Plan For:**

• Review shop drawings and prototypes

• Proofread plotter/layout proofs of each sign

**Items to Expect of the Fabricator:**

• A production schedule for fabrication and installation

• Prototypes

• A final review of drawings and plotter/layout proofs before fabrication

Once signs are installed, there may still be additional signs needed shortly after completion. Replacement signs, or signs that can be seamlessly added to the system as needed, should be provided as a form of *attic stock*. Reordering signs can be expensive if custom colors have to be matched. The consultant can provide advice on which signs should be ordered for *attic stock*.

**Items to Expect of the Design Consultant**

• Respond to information requests by the fabricator.

• Review shop drawings and prototype signs.

• Proofread plotter/layout proofs of each sign.
• Visit the project site during installation.
• Provide a walk-through inspection and review of punch list.

Adequate documentation of the sign system should include a bookshelf sign system reference manual that can be used to reorder signs. A three ring binder with pages that can be faxed easily is highly recommended. These drawings should provide everything a sign maker needs to fabricate the sign. The design consultant should provide both this reference manual and a CD ROM of the sign layouts and construction details.

6. PROCUREMENT

As noted above, design consultants are usually needed for projects greater than about 20,000 sq. ft. For smaller projects, signage can be developed and design working directly with a sign fabricator, though a signage design consultant is recommended in these cases as well. Requirements for ADA signs (Braille and tactile graphics) make in-house sign fabrication more difficult than in the past, for example.

Custom signs can be tailored to complement the building architecture as well as serve a functional need. This includes custom sizing of signs as well as employing unique materials and finishes.

Standardized sign components, which are mass-produced, can provide an economy of scale. Samples are required for this approach, to ensure that excellent quality components are provided. Custom colors can make standard sign products fit color schemes, and re-ordering is simpler and more economical as well. However, these signs may not be much less expensive than custom signs, and there are limits to sign sizes and styles in standardized systems.

There are several ways to purchase signs including sole source purchasing or competitive bidding.

Sole Source Purchasing is used in the case of a small purchase or for private institutions that are not required to have competitive bidding, and includes a negotiated price from a proven vendor. The benefit of using sole source purchasing is that it requires less schedule time (no bidding phase) and it is likely to get the most direct response and attention from a prospective sign company. The disadvantage is the absence of an incentive for competitive pricing.

Competitive Bidding invites several sign fabricators into a competitive bidding process. By pre-qualifying the prospective vendors, the Library Team can control who may be allowed to submit bids and who may not. This usually limits bidders to fabricators with experience in projects of comparable size and complexity. Checking with previous clients and visiting installed recent projects can help in the process of pre-qualification.

Signage procurement can be included within the general contract for library construction, or it can be held separately from the general contract. Including it within the general
contractor’s responsibility often holds the contractor to a budget figure that is established when the bids are awarded. Producing the signage through a separate bid contract that is not part of the general contractor’s work will allow more attention to be placed on the quality of the sign system. This usually will result in better final products and allow the signage to have its own production schedule as well. Not only is the general contractor’s mark-up eliminated, but any changes go directly through the sign project manager, rather than through the general contractor, which will save time and money.

7. **APPENDIX**

**Codes, Governing Agencies, and Required Signage**

There are many codified sign requirements including national, state and local codes, including the following prominent list of sign code requirements:

**Code Requirements**

*The Americans with Disabilities Act* – A series of national guidelines to help persons with disabilities achieve equal access to all public spaces in America.

The Americans with Disabilities Act is commonly known as the *ADA* or *ADAAG* (pronounced A-DAG) for the Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines. These guidelines require that most destinations in a public building that are identified with a sign must have Braille and tactile identification information in order to provide orientation to the blind and vision-impaired population. For a comprehensive interpretation of the signage section of the ADA, contact the Society for Environmental Graphic Design (SEGD) in Washington, DC (202) 638-5555 or by email: SEGDOffice@aol.com and request a copy of the *SEGD White Paper on ADA Signage*.

In addition to mandated requirements for disabled access, growing segments of the American population have other special needs. *Universal Design* is a term applied to such planning.

*California State Title 19 / Life Safety* - This affects egress from a building in an emergency situation (fire, flood, earthquake, etc). Typically, evacuation maps are required for buildings with two or more stories. Check with the local fire department for exact requirements.

*State of California Title 24 / Disabled Parking and Ingress* - This affects parking and pathways to public places. Specifically, this section states that certain parking spaces must be marked with the *International Symbol of Accessibility*. This statute affects van accessible parking, paths, ramps and elevators.

*Proposition 65 / Hazardous Chemicals Warning Information* – This typically requires
posting of notices at entrances of buildings where hazardous chemicals might be in use.

*California State Vehicle Codes* – These affect and control vehicular activity such as roadway signage for vehicle safety, parking restrictions, tow away legal notices, and specific wording for same.

Local Ordinances – Such ordinances range from restriction of smoking in public places to vehicular / parking / tow-away noticing.

Maximum occupancy notices are typically required in large public gathering places such as library meeting rooms. These are used as a tool to determine if a gathering is too large and therefore unsafe for groups occupying the space.

Exterior signs typically require a sign permit and usually a review by the local planning department. Some communities require a sign committee, an architectural review board and a historic district committee review. Each community has guidelines for the maximum size and the maximum number of signs allowed for each business or public place.
Sign Planning Checklist

The following sign types are candidates for a comprehensive sign program.

**Exterior Signs**
- Primary building identification, freestanding or on facade (name of bldg)
- Monument sign (primary or secondary signature, freestanding in landscape)
- Building address (often required by Fire Dept for emergency purposes)
- Building entry ID (eye level at pedestrian entrance(s))
- Restriction sign (No smoking, no food or drink, no skateboards, etc.)
- Hours of operation
- Delivery entrance
- Directional signing (to key entrances, bridges to other facilities)
- Disabled access (preferred routes to vertical transportation)
- Donor recognition or building dedication cornerstone
- Touch screen interactive displays

**Parking & Vehicular Signs**
- Parking ID
- Directional signs
- Parking fee information
- Tow away / private parking disclaimer
- Disabled access parking

**Interior Signs**
- Main building directory (departments, personnel, resources)
- Building floor directories on each level (departments, destinations, facilities)
- Directional signing to key destinations
- Circulation Desk / Information Station Interactive Touch Screen
- Area ID (i.e., Circulation, Information, Registration)
- Desk bar (reception, station closed, circulation, etc.)
- Book drop sign for front desk
- Suggestion board or box with reply board
- Weekly calendar of events board
- Library shelves and/or stack-end signs (w/ changeable insert system)
- Conference room ID with (in-use) slider panel
- Room ID sign
- Office and Workstation ID sign (flexible/changeable)
- Informative signs (i.e. instructions for computers, copiers, etc.)
- Telephone and other services
- Restriction signs (No smoking, No food or drink, No Cell Phones, etc.)
- Emergency door ID (to restrict exiting / alarm will sound)
- Code, Regulatory And Universal Access Signing
- Restroom ID
- Accessible facility maps (showing elevators, room numbers, restrooms, phones, etc.)
- Room occupancy / emergency procedures booklet
- Stair code sign, required at stairwells
- Evacuation map

Further Sources of Information
### Societies and Organizations

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<tr>
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<th>Website</th>
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### Glossary

- **ADA**: Americans with Disabilities Act and/or Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines. National sign standards were put in place in 1990 to ensure equal access for all persons in America.

- **Braille And Tactile Lettering**: Braille letters/words and 1/32" raised lettering used for ADA public identification and destination signs. Preferably grade two Braille as defined by the Braille Institute. Braille Bullets, small beads that are inserted into sign faces to accommodate Braille information as required by the ADA. Can be clear, plastic or metal.

- **Cap Height**: The height of an upper case letter.

- **Donor Recognition**: A sign, plaque or graphic display to recognize and honor the generosity of contributors to a project.

- **Elevation**: Drawing of the vertical, straight-on view of a building, sign or other three dimensional object. Other views include a plan view (from top looking down), section view (cut-thru view) and exploded view (component parts shown separately, arranged to show their relationship to each other).

- **Life Safety Signs**: Used for police, fire, security, evacuation and other life safety information.

- **Message Schedule**: An inventory or list indicating the quantities of signs and approved messages for each individual sign. Typically is used by sign fabricators at the "control document" for final text and sign wording.

- **Prototype**: Usually a full sized sample that uses final materials, methods of construction, fasteners and finishes to test assembly, design, construction and appearance issues. Also used approve the "first sample" in a long production run.

- **Shop Drawings**: In signage, it now refers to drawings prepared by fabricators describing their intended methods of construction and sequence of assembly. The
essential reason for shop drawings is to be sure the original design concept is accurately carried out in the construction process.

**Sign Types**
Each unique style of sign or component.

**Typography**
The use of letterforms, of any language/s, used to communicate a message to an audience. Also referred to as includes fonts, lettering, alphabets and typefaces.

**Wayfinding**
Wayfinding is the methodology of arranging indicators such as signs, light, color, materials, and pathways, to guide people to their destinations. A successful wayfinding program is intuitive and self-navigable, and it protects the overall visual integrity of the site. Wayfinding is specific to its place and visitors.

**References**
Jan Carpman, *Design That Cares*. This book provides good rationale and straightforward thinking for planning large and complex wayfinding systems.

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