As it moves forward with expansion plans, the David Owsley Museum of Art has hired consultant Myriam Springuel to develop an interpretive plan. Her firm, Springuel Consulting, works with museums and other nonprofits as they grow, change, and look to the future.

Springuel holds a Master of Arts in Art History from the University of Maryland. She has worked as associate director for programs at the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Services, and curated fine arts exhibitions and developed education programs at the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art.

Calling the interpretive plan “the intellectual backbone of the museum,” Springuel describes it as a document that “explains what you are going to be doing with your collection and why you are doing it.”

“It’s really a thinking through of the big picture—what is it you are doing, why it is visitors should come, and what they are going to find once they get there,” she says.

Developing an interpretive plan involves getting to know the museum, its staff, and its visitors. Beyond spending time with the staff, Springuel has held a series of stakeholder meetings gathering information about the museum from the point of view of university officials, faculty, students, and community members.

Springuel says that while the interpretive plan is only in its draft stage, there are already pieces of the larger picture coming into focus.

“The notion of the museum as a place for a conversation about the arts really resonated with people,” she says.

Developing an environment that promotes those conversations is something that has come out of interpretive planning.

Springuel and the museum staff recently visited the Detroit Institute of Art where they were inspired by the way that institution helps visitors understand the ways in which works of art speak to them.

“They have created interpretation that meets visitors with what they are looking at,” she says. “It starts with questions the visitor is going to be asking as opposed to starting with information the curator wants to present.”

Offering an open, inviting, and engaging museum experience for all its visitors has always been the David Owsley Museum of Art’s goal, and that has come through in the process of working through the interpretive plan, Springuel says.

“My sense is that this is a museum that would like you to come in and understand that you have walked into someplace extraordinarily special,” she says. “But in that special place they want you to be very engaged and be comfortable, so sitting down on the floor, pulling out your laptop, that’s perfectly appropriate behavior.”