

## **A Community Guide to Creating Public Art**

Public Art as an Agent for Change in Your Neighborhood  
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Public Art is a wonderful way for neighborhoods to create a new image, solve a problem, tell a story, and develop/maintain an identity.

Celebrating the arts and artists in your community reflects vibrancy that attracts visitors and residents. Creative communities nurture economic development and help define quality of life.

There are many ways to incorporate public art in a community. But where in the world do you begin? Like any other community based actions, creating public art requires vision, organization, and a lot of elbow grease!

This handbook is designed for projects that are not sponsored by a formalized public art program, but for grass-roots communities looking to bring a vision into reality. It is geared to those who have never administered a public art project before and for communities who are looking to create public art together.

### **Why Public Art?**

In addition to the quality of life that art contributes by its very nature, public art can help a community to do a number of things:

#### **Welcome and introduce people to a neighborhood**

Art can be the gateway to a neighborhood. It can create or enhance gathering places marking important areas and giving a strong first impression.

#### **Positive Exposure**

Art is 'sexy'. It is a good story. Implementing public art will give your neighborhood a reason to toot its horn and receive positive support and possible press coverage.

### **Attract business and positively impact tourism**

Interesting areas attract people. Some people seek out public art and will come to an area specifically to see it. Others may be attracted by the tone set by the artwork and choose to stay longer or come back for more.

### **Encourage and direct foot traffic**

Public Art can be used to subtly create way-finding for people. In other words artwork can help identify direction, define place, and deter trespassing. Textures in ground coverings, patterns, sound, and even text and images can be incorporated into sidewalks, streets, plazas, and parks to define an area and create interest.

### **Personalize a neighborhood and build character and identity**

Public Art tells our stories or creates new ones. It can visually relay the character of a neighborhood, city or town. The public art becomes part of the fabric of the community, sometimes becoming the symbol that represents the area.

### **Demonstrate neighborhood pride that attracts new residents and discourages vandalism.**

The existence of Public Art in a community is a reflection that the community cares and invests in its quality of life. The same community that is active and proactive is less likely to have vandalism due to the presence of caring people.

### **Transform community eyesores into community assets**

Sometimes art can be used to turn negative impacts into assets. Large walls covered with graffiti can be transformed into murals or major infrastructure impacts like substations or water treatment plants can include an artist on the design team to create a beautiful structure that contributes to the district instead of being an eyesore.

So when you are asked "why art?" these reasons provide valid arguments for creating public art in your community and rallying support from people who may not understand the contribution that art makes to our society.

## **DEFINING THE NEED**

It is important for communities to take an inventory of who they are: histories, demographics, assets, challenges. This first step is a good way to get a profile of the neighborhood and figure out a direction. The following steps are recommendations for the process.

1. Pull together residents and business owners (stakeholders in your community) and hold a couple of inventory meetings with the goal of improving the neighborhood.

2. Decide what locations you would like to cover and literally walk through your neighborhoods making lists of things that are good and those that could be improved.

3. Meet back and compile all of the insights.

4. Have the community add other perceived assets and liabilities that may not be "visible". (Strong sense of community, no young people, etc ..)

5. What are the community issues that everyone is paying attention to? ( youth , tourism, revitalization, economics, community identity, livability, etc.) This will help you to focus what your priorities and issues are.

6. Develop a list of top community priorities/issues.

7. Figure out what priorities could be helped by public art. (Not all issues are best solved by art)

## **THE DIFFERENT FACES OF PUBLIC ART**

So what exactly is public art?

Public art can be as direct as a sculpture on the corner or a painting on the wall. It can be integrated into the architecture of a building, transform everyday street amenities like light standards and bus shelters, or impact a site for a limited amount of time.

## **DEFINITIONS**

### **Design Team Artist**

Artist participates at the earliest stage of development and works with the other designers (architects, engineers, etc) to create the project.

### **Commissioned Works**

Artists can be commissioned to create work specifically for a project and be asked to create a site-specific

### **Direct Purchase**

### **Site Specific Artwork**

Artwork is created specifically for a location and responds to that location.

### **Discreet Artworks**

Artwork is independent of the site and is placed in a location as a free standing piece.

### **Temporary Work**

Artwork is created for a temporary amount of time. Impact is short term.

## **Where and Why**

### **Public art in URBAN INFRASTRUCTURE**

Consider public art as an integral part of City planning and design in order to stimulate new ideas and sensitivity to our visual environment and the functional structures that shape the city. Public art should transform the potentially unattractive structures that typify water systems, electric transfer stations, and transportation systems into meaningful public symbols. These projects create opportunities for unique educational, recreational, and cultural experiences in commonplace structures such as sidewalks, bridges, street lighting, parking meters, parking lots, bus shelters, manhole covers, tree grates, and other street furniture.

## **CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE**

Identify public art opportunities that highlight the cultural and historical connections within our community through local history, environmental systems, diverse cultural traditions and visual symbols.

## **SENSE OF PLACE/Identity**

Use public art to create unique community places, define or redefine public spaces, or suggest experiences that evoke a strong sense of orientation. This type of work gives identity to the larger community as well as celebrates smaller neighborhoods.

Artists have the gift of telling communities' stories and translating those stories in unique visual forms.

## **LANDMARKS**

Use public art to create visible landmarks and artistic points of reference. These projects should serve as beacons, build community pride and reinforce community identity.

## **PUBLIC BUILDINGS**

Incorporate public art into public buildings (new and old) in order to enhance civic pride and engage employees/citizens in participation, support of, and involvement in the arts.

## **TEMPORARY WORKS**

Temporary public works can accomplish a short-term celebration of the arts and express a specific community purpose. Temporary public art allows for unusual media that is not usually considered in permanent public art pieces. Video, performance, and non-permanent materials can be employed.

**How the artist is brought into the process.**

## **DIRECT PURCHASE OR COMMISSIONED WORK**

Artwork is purchased directly by an artist to place in a public space. Or artists are asked to submit proposals of artwork to fit within a community. Then the community selects an artist to create a work specifically for the community.

## **Community integrated works**

An artist or team of artists are selected to work directly with members of the public to develop a project and collectively create a work of art. This type of project explores opportunities for the meaningful involvement of citizens of all ages in the art-making process.

## **DEVELOPING A VISION FOR PUBLIC ART**

It is important for your community to understand the many different ways that public art can be expressed. There are so many approaches, it is important to take the time to look at examples of public art in other communities and educate yourself and others about the wide range of possibilities. Before meeting with the stakeholders of your community, do some research and get examples of public art in your own city or town, and in other communities.

After reviewing examples of public art, try this exercise to help figure out the full spectrum of possibilities before you determine what type of public art is best for your community.

1. What types of public art have you seen that you like or dislike?
2. What types of media can be used to create public art?
3. Where would you like to see public art placed or utilized in your community? (You may want to refer back to the priorities determined in the previous exercise).
4. Who should be involved in making public art? (local artists, national artists, youth, architects, etc)

5. Public art is a reflection of what your community values. What would be appropriate for reflecting your community today?

6. Without reducing your community to a 'theme' are there stories, images, symbols that strongly relate to your neighborhood or town?

Once the community is thinking about different ways public art can help the community, send them out to do research on their own. The world of public art will start to open up and no one will be able to go on vacation without noticing the place of public art in communities.

## **GETTING STARTED**

You have prioritized your community need and decided how public art can act as an agent for change, it is time to plan the project.

## **BASIC STEPS**

### **Step 1 Decide What You Want.**

Based on community brainstorming exercises or ideas generated in a public forum, make a general decision about what you would like to do.

Do you want to create:

A gathering place?

A Gateway?

Wayfinding elements?

Decorative fences?

A Mural?

Street Furniture? (benches, tree grates, tree guards, bollards)

Pathways?

Sculpture?

Sculptural streetlights?

Façade improvements?

A fountain?

Earthworks?

Sidewalk decorations?

What else?

## **Step 2 Select a site**

Where will the art make the most impact in your neighborhood? Based on your community inventory, it may become apparent where art would make the most impact. Don't locate your artwork in an area that is hard to see or seldom visited.

You want to use the art to transform or enhance an area. You want to choose a site that will work harmoniously with art. You don't want the artwork to get lost in too large of a space or dwarf the community, if you are enhancing an area frequented by pedestrians. The following sites should be considered:

A major entryway into your neighborhood

A blighted area that needs to be transformed

A new community center or park



An empty wall that is the target of graffiti

An area where new sidewalks are being poured or new trees are being planted

A bus stop or light rail station

Other ideas?

### **Step 3 Define Your Parameters**

When you decide what you want and where you want it, you need to decide what other parameters there are. It is important to have input and create guidelines for an artist to work within. Be careful however, not to make the parameters so strict that the artist has no room for creativity. For example, if you want to make a sign that has your logo on it and you already have the design, just go to a fabricator and have it built. In this instance, you don't need an artist because you have already created the end result.

Hiring an artist to create something based on your neighborhood's histories, stories, and desires allows the artist to build on that information and create something beyond your imagination.

#### **Parameters you may set can range from a basic idea:**

We would like an artist to create an entryway feature that will mark the borders of our district.

To material specifications:

We would like an artist to create an entryway feature out of wood that will not exceed 15' x 6' x 6' in size .

To content specifications:

We would like an artist to create an entryway feature that reflects the diversity of our neighborhood. Then give a description of what that means.

You can expect the artist to work within the parameters you set, but you want to allow for the artist to have room to explore those guidelines and themes. A good artist will investigate your community and work with you to come up with an idea that resonates with you and visually illustrates your ideas.

#### **Step 4 Determine the Budget**

It is important to know what your budget is so that you can raise the appropriate amount of money and are able to complete your project successfully. Often, this is a "chicken and an egg" scenario. You know you want an entryway sculpture, but you have no idea how much that will cost!

This is where you will need to do some research. If you have a general idea about what you would like, you may have seen something like it somewhere, ask around and see what other communities paid. If you know the general size and materials of a piece, ask trades people what materials would cost to build a structure so big and so wide. Say you want to paint a mural, call the places that have murals and ask them the details. Call a few mural artists and ask them for approximate bids.

You need to have your budget determined before you find funding and before you put your request out for an artist. Once you have determined your budget, try to stick to it. Ask the artist to create something that works within your budget. If the artist comes up with more ideas that cost more, ask him or her to create an itemized budget for what would be more than the basic project you are requesting. If you decide to create more and are able to pay for it, you may decide to do so as a community.

#### **Step 5 Identify Funding Sources**

As usual, paying for improvements is often half the battle. Depending on your community, there are a variety of paths to pursue.

**Arts Commissions :** Many cities, counties and states have a local arts commission that provides grants or has a stable funding source specifically for public art.

Neighborhood Programs : Many cities have neighborhood improvement programs that offer grants for improvement of blight and general enhancements.

Foundations : Local and national foundations exist with missions to improve the communities in which they reside. They typically have granting programs that require a letter of intent from a community and will often support projects that include art as an element for change.

Sponsorships : Businesses and service organizations in your community are often willing to support causes that will improve neighborhoods and make your district a destination. Many businesses such as banks are required to give back to the community. Contact the community relations divisions of these businesses and if that doesn't work, try the marketing department.

In-kind Donations: In-kind donations are all donations other than cash money. This includes materials and volunteer labor. Some businesses may not give money, but they would be happy to give materials. Maybe you have a local lumber store or home improvement store in your area, they may be more than willing to donate wood or paint. Don't forget the power of volunteers. Volunteers can help prepare the site, help the artist with installation and save time and money in many other ways.

City Government : Sometimes if a city is going to install streetlights, benches, or tree grates in your neighborhood, they might be willing to work with the community to install something more interesting than the average items. Also, if there is extensive disruption in your neighborhood due to construction, you may be able to negotiate artwork as mitigation. Sometimes this is temporary, like the painted fences you see around construction sites and sometimes it is an electric transfer station that is transformed into a work of art because the citizens demanded not to have the same old ugly structure plopped in the middle of their community.

Individual donors: You can raise money from individual donors in your community. List the donors names on a plaque near the site so that people feel a real sense of ownership. Some communities sell donor bricks, where the name of the donor is listed on bricks that become part of the public art piece, either in the ground or on a wall. Be creative.

All of these funders want to be part of a well supported and interesting community project that will help beautify and create interest in the neighborhood.

Art projects are exciting and usually draw attention in the press. Be sure to tell the funders be it a granting organization or local businesses that they will be recognized in literature about the project, their name will be printed on a plaque that will be installed near the project, and they will be publicly thanked in the dedication ceremony that is organized when the project is complete.

## **Step 6 Select an Artist.**

There are several ways to find an artist or artists for your project. You have defined your parameters. You know what you want, where you want it, how much it will cost, and where you will get the money. Now you need to find an artist. This is really no different than finding the right candidate for a job.

### **Hire an artist directly**

You may have someone in mind that you would like to hire directly. You should give this person a job description and interview him/her and be sure that they can complete the job effectively. Remember, you are hiring someone for a job that you want to be well done. You should ask the person the same questions you would ask if you were interviewing a number of candidates. You want to know their credentials and if they have successfully completed any projects before.

### **Call to Artists**

Requesting submissions from a number of artists allows for a wider range of possibilities and talent. You as a community, need to define the job description (the Call to Artists), advertise the job, and interview the candidates. You may want to determine a selection committee. This committee should be comprised of people who understand the community need, have a sense of the arts, and it is helpful to have someone with an architectural, engineering, or building background to determine if the proposals you receive will be feasible in an outdoor environment.

You can approach your local arts commission if you have one to see if they have a list of artists to recommend. Some arts commissions have a slide registry that includes artists in your area who are skilled at creating public art projects.

Create a "Call to Artists". This is your job description. It should list as many details as you can include. Who you are, what you want, where you want it, why you want it, your budget, what you expect that budget to include, deadline for submission, projected timeline for the project, what you expect the artist to submit, and a site description or picture if you have one.

This "Call to Artists" should be translated into a press release and listed in your local papers, mailed to schools, arts commissions, galleries and museums. The more detailed prospectus can then be mailed to those people who request it.

The artist should be asked to submit slides, a letter of interest, and a general idea about how they would approach the project. Artists should submit these materials by the deadline you set.

The committee should review the materials and determine how many artists to interview.

There are two ways to go from here. When the committee pares down the pool to the artists they are most interested in seeing they can :

1. Set up interviews with the artists. Artists are often asked to bring in slides of their work so they can talk about it and give the committee a better sense of the artists' sensibility and intent. Then the committee can ask the artist a number of questions that will help determine not only if the artist is skilled, but how they would work within the budget, how they would work with the community, their experience with public projects and other questions that will determine them the best person for the job.
2. The Committee can select a few finalists to come up with a more detailed proposal for the project. These finalists can then meet with the committee to find out more about the site, the community, and any other information you can share to help them come up with a proposal. This proposal would include drawings or a model, a budget and a timing . Because you are asking the artist to do work that may or may not be selected, it is typical to pay the finalists an honorarium (a stipend) for their efforts. The range of this honorarium depends upon the project of course. A simple project with a small budget might pay an honorarium of \$50 - \$100 per artist. A project requiring a model and a fixed design for a larger and more involved project might be a \$500 honorarium.

## **Step 7 Hiring the artist**

Once the committee selects the artist, it is important to notify those who were not selected and congratulate the artist you have chosen.

Contracts are necessary to protect you and the artist. They clarify your expectations and help to guide the process. The contract should be signed by all necessary parties before any work begins.

It is good to stage your contract in phases. Many artists don't have the money to purchase all of their materials up front, so there are ways to stage the payments so the artist has to complete all of the work before complete payment is made, but is able to secure some of the funds up front for purchasing materials and getting started.

## **Step 8 Project Management**

In a community project, it is good to have a designated committee that will work with the artist. It is very helpful if there is a point person on the committee for the artist. That person can help the artist problem solve and bring issues back to the larger community if necessary.

The contract should be the basis for the structure of the project. All expectations for the artist, responsibilities for the committee, timelines, budgets and pay schedule should be outlined in the contract.

It is a good idea to tie the pay phases to review and approval by the committee. This gives the artist clear direction and goals to meet.

There are usually several phases to follow before a piece is completed:  
Information gathering (the artist researches the community, ideas, and approaches)  
Conceptual Phase (This is just an idea phase. It is often more of a direction. Approval at this phase means the artist can continue working in this vein refining the idea. It is important to give clear direction at this point.)

Schematic Phase (This is when you should see a drawing or mock up that identifies what the piece will entail, there may be some refinishing. Approval at this phase gives the go ahead to final design. Sometimes, if the committee approves this submission it can be accepted as final)

Final Design (The design is complete, but not built/completed. There is still some room for adjustments, but none that veer too heavily from final design if possible. Approval at this phase gives the go ahead for implementation.)

Completion of piece.

### **The Role of the Committee:**

- Act as guiding force for the artist.
- Manage the contract.
- Provide direction, information, and access to the larger community.
- Assist with fundraising if necessary.
- Review and approve designs and approaches at predetermined phases.
- Determine when to share ideas, designs, or finished product with the larger community.
- It is the role of the committee to provide as much support as they can for the artist to help the project develop.
- It is not the role of the committee to design the piece.
- Create the identification plaque.
- Organize the dedication ceremony.

### **The Role of the Artist:**

- Work with the committee and community in a professional manner.
- Present ideas in a timely fashion to the committee.
- Accept input and try to incorporate it into the artwork when appropriate.
- Communicate why some input may or may not work with artists' concept.

- Unless otherwise claimed by the committee, get any permits, engineering approval, and other preparatory steps before installing artwork.
- Complete the artwork successfully.
- Provide maintenance information to the committee.

### **Special Note: Stewardship and Maintenance of Artwork**

Artwork that is created and not maintained can quickly become another eyesore! When working with the artist, address ease of maintenance in the design and implementation of the piece. Consider how you will maintain and clean the piece over the years. Consider creating a savings fund for the sole purpose of taking care of the piece over the years. Remember, you may be creating a piece that will need to be taken care of into the future. Consider the future leaders of your organization and make it easy for them to maintain your legacy.

### **Step 9 Celebrating**

Your project is completed! Now you need to celebrate. It is usually the responsibility of the commissioning group to create a plaque to install near the artwork. This plaque should include the artist's name, the date of completion, the group commissioning the work, any story or educational material about the work, and sponsors.

A dedication ceremony is a nice way to invite your community to christen the new artwork, thank the artist, recognize the sponsors, and get publicity! Be sure to name the work of art and the artist who created it. Make a big deal out of it. You have just contributed a wonderful addition to your neighborhood.

Remember to always credit the artist in any photographs or publications you may produce. It is part of their copyright and good protocol.



## **Public Art as an Agent for Change in Your Neighborhood**

Public Art is a wonderful way for neighborhoods to create a new image, solve a problem, tell their story, and mark the neighborhood as unique. Public art can:

Advertise the neighborhood

Encourage visitors and residents to stop their cars, park and explore

Encourage and direct foot traffic

Personalize a neighborhood and builds character and identity

Attract business and positively impacts tourism

Welcome and introduce people to a neighborhood

Demonstrate neighborhood pride that attracts new residents and discourages vandalism.

Transforms community eyesores into community assets

Public art comes in many forms these days. Many cities, counties, and states have a secure funding source for public art. This often is based on a percent of construction. I.e. a percent of the funds that go toward funding new public buildings goes to create art. Check with your local arts commission and see if your community has such a fund. If so, make the commission aware that your community is interested in being involved in projects that are placed in your community. Tacoma recently passed a 1% for art ordinance.

This handbook is designed for projects that are not sponsored by a formalized public art program although many of the steps apply. The intent is to guide you through the process of determining why to have public art, where to put it, and how to go about it. Like any other community based actions, creating public art requires vision, organization, and a lot of elbow grease!

There are many approaches to incorporate the arts both in small and big ways to make an impact. You may decide to replace a ratty fence. Why not have an artist design the new one? You may be pouring new sidewalks. Why not add color, or inset artwork to add interest and history? You might have an unsightly building wall in a prominent area of your neighborhood. Why not paint a mural?

### **DEFINING THE NEED**

Public Art should reflect the community identity.

It is important for communities to take an inventory of who they are: histories, demographics, assets, challenges. This first step is a good way to get a profile of the neighborhood and figure out what directions to go in.

Pull together residents and business owners (stakeholders in your community) and hold a couple of inventory meetings with the goal of improving the neighborhood.

Decide what areas you would like to cover and literally walk through your neighborhoods making lists of things that are good and those that could be improved. (You can use the worksheet Addendum A to help you out)

Meet back and compile all of the insights.

Have the community add other assets and liabilities that may not be "visible". What are the community issues that everyone is paying attention to? (youth, tourism, revitalization, economics, community identity, livability, etc.) This will help you to focus what your priorities and issues are.

Develop a list of top community priorities/issues.

Figure out what priorities could be helped by public art.

## THE DIFFERENT FACES OF PUBLIC ART

There are many different ways that public art can be used to improve your community. Review the following descriptions of how public art can be used to help figure out how you would like to use it.

### SENSE OF PLACE

Use public art to create unique community places, define or redefine public spaces, or suggest experiences that evoke a strong sense of orientation. This type of work gives identity to the larger community as well as celebrates smaller neighborhoods. Artists have the gift of telling communities' stories and translating those stories in unique visual forms.

### URBAN INFRASTRUCTURE

Consider public art as an integral part of City planning and design in order to stimulate new ideas and sensitivity to our visual environment and the functional structures that shape the city. Public art should transform the potentially unattractive structures that typify water systems, electric transfer stations, and transportation systems into meaningful public symbols. These projects create opportunities for unique educational, recreational, and cultural experiences in commonplace structures such as sidewalks, bridges, street lighting, parking meters, parking lots, bus shelters, manhole covers, tree grates, and other street furniture.

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## PUBLIC BUILDINGS

Incorporate public art into public buildings (new and old) in order to enhance civic pride and engage employees/citizens in participation, support of, and involvement in the arts.

## TEMPORARY WORKS

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## COMMUNITY PROJECTS

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reflecting your community today? Once the community is thinking about different ways public art can help the community, send them out to do research on their own. The world of public art will start to open up and no one will be able to go on vacation without noticing the place of public art in communities.