

# BEST PRACTICES IN PUBLIC ART

OCTOBER, 2020



The Orange County Arts Commission wishes to encourage and assist public art projects throughout Orange County and can serve as a resource and consultant for municipalities, businesses, and artists wishing to create public art. Public art can be a tool to engage the community, raise awareness about a specific issue or topic, or simply beautify our neighborhoods. An understanding of best practices is critical to valuing our artists and creating meaningful work that is embraced by the community.

## ➤➤➤ GETTING STARTED

**Identify the purpose of the project.** Public art can bring attention to a building or public space, honor a significant person or moment in time, or divert attention from vacancy or construction projects. It can engage youth, invite community participation, or simply serve as a beautiful gift to residents and visitors.

**Things to consider:** Identify one of the following parameters as a starting point:

- **Budget number:** Make sure the scope of your idea is in line with the funds you have available. Public art budgets greatly vary depending on the size of the project, the location, and whether or not an artist is creating a new work or providing a piece of work already in their inventory.
- **A specific building or area to activate:** Consider whether artwork is appropriate in a specific location and if it will be visible by the public. Is it allowed by the property owner or the town? Are there limitations as to what can be included? (*Example: Town of Carrboro has restrictions limiting the size of words that can be included in a mural*). For murals, what is the wall surface and can it be covered? (*Example: Town of Hillsborough doesn't allow original bricks walls to be covered in the Historic District*).
- **A concept or idea to promote:** Context is everything in public art. The subject matter should be considered in relation to the location, the artist creating the work, and the ultimate purpose of the work. Does the neighborhood where the work will be located support the project? Have they been given an opportunity to provide input? Will the artist hired represent the culture or community being depicted by the work? Does the work fulfill the initial purpose of the project?

## ➤➤➤ HOW TO PREPARE

Before issuing a Call to Artists, it is important to have the following in place:

**Committed funding** for promoting the project, hiring the artist, supplies, and equipment or materials that might be needed for installation.

**A staff person** within the town to coordinate logistics like road closures, safety plans, installation and unveiling, purchasing materials, and documenting the project.

**A clear understanding** of the project vision and goals.

**A timeline** for the project, including promotion of the call and application period, artist selection, fabrication, and unveiling.

**A marketing plan.** There are many artists who do public art. Are you reaching beyond your immediate circle? Are artists of all types being given the opportunity to apply?

**A selection panel**, including stakeholders such as property owners and local residents, visual artists, and administrators familiar with the public art process. The panel should represent the diversity of the community in which the work will be located.

## ➤➤➤ BEST PRACTICES

**Fair compensation:** All artists should be paid fairly for their time including planning and travel, design, community engagement, installation, intellectual property, documentation and reporting. Their work is not free. Costs associated with their work include their time, insurance, supplies, and additional help depending on the scope of the project. The rate of payment should consider the scale/complexity of the project, how much community engagement is required, and if the artist will be working with students or community members (and if so, make sure they're vetted!).

**Artist selection:** Private property owners have the freedom to select any artist they chose (but we hope they too will follow best practices). However, when using public dollars to hire an artist and/or installing work on public property, the process must be equitable and transparent. The primary ways of soliciting artists are Requests for Qualifications (RFQ) or Requests for Proposals (RFP).

- **RFQ:** Artists apply to a RFQ using examples of past work/projects and descriptions of relevant experience. The review panel selects finalists based on their past experience and specific style of work. Three to five finalists are paid a stipend to develop a concept for the specific project; these final concepts are brought back to the review committee for the final selection of the artist.
- **RFP:** Artists submit ideas for the project (typically without payment) via sketches or images of finished work/designs. RFP's are an option when existing work is preferred such as group exhibitions or loans of artwork. RFP's can also be used to engage emerging artists or students who would not be competitive based on their relative lack of experience. Professional artists are less likely to apply for RFPs and it can be difficult to select an artist from ideas rather than engaging them in the entire process.

**Selection Criteria:** The OCAC encourages the use of the [Aesthetic Perspectives Guide](#), which includes a list of criteria that can be used to evaluate projects and applications. This guide considers community engagement or connection, new or experimental media, innovative techniques or placekeeping/storytelling. This framework helps all stakeholders participate whether or not they have in-depth knowledge of public art.

**Community Engagement:** Especially when producing art on public property or with public funding, community input is critical. Engagement ideally takes place before the project begins or after the artist is selected but before they begin their work. Interaction can also take place during installation.

**Originality:** Public art needs to be original and done by artists. There are incredible public art projects throughout the world, but they have already been done. The magic of artists is their ability to create something new and one-of-a-kind, and local artists especially have the ability to capture the unique spirit and character of our community. However, if a project is going to be replicated, either the original artist should be hired or grant the organizers permission to replicate the project.

## ➤➤➤ MORE RESOURCES

### **General guidance and information:**

Orange County Arts Commission  
[Katie Murray](#), 919-245-2335

### **Where to share your Call for Artists:**

Local: [Orange County Arts Commission](#)  
Statewide: [North Carolina Arts Council](#)  
National: [Americans for the Arts](#)

### **National resources:**

[Americans for the Arts](#)