



Guide To Public Art

You're an artist but you've never done public art before? Don't let that stop you. This guide will help you get your first application submitted, prepare for being a finalist and get you ready to make public art. We'll offer tips for strengthening your portfolio, understanding legal issues, knowing your rights, and hiring a fabricator.

If you have questions not addressed in this guide, please [contact us](#). Additionally, we offer a free Public Art Academy workshop series for eight weeks in February/March (one night a week). Applications are available in December with up to 20 students accepted.

Now, let's get started.

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The Basics

What is public art? While there are many definitions, the most commonly understood is that it is art that is publicly accessible such as an outdoor mural, sculpture, or mosaic. It may be privately or publicly funded, but anyone can see it without paying admission. In Boise this also extends to paintings in City-owned collections which are displayed in public buildings such as City Hall and the Airport.

How are artists chosen? The artists selected for public commissions or purchases are chosen through competitive processes and usually selected by a panel of stakeholders involved with the project. Whether you are emerging or established in your career as an artist, the City of Boise is always looking for new, creative artwork to enliven our streets and public buildings. Many artists have launched their public art careers here in Boise.

How is it different than what an artist usually does? Applying for a public art project has more steps and different considerations than showing at a gallery or local coffee shop. There are things to consider that are specific to public art such as the application process, creating a proposal, working with fabricators, and consideration of long-term maintenance.

What if I apply and am selected? After you apply, usually up to three finalists are selected and paid a fee to create a site-specific concept proposal. For many artists it's new to design an art project before it is built. This is necessary to choose the final artist and get approvals from the funders and political leadership. There are lots of things to consider when creating a proposal including budget, relationship to site, material choice and how to put it all together to communicate your ideas to a panel.

What if I win the commission? If you are selected for a public art project, you'll sign a contract, get insurance, fabricate or sub-contract fabrication, and install your artwork. Typically artists provide a warranty for one year past the completion date and then the art has to be maintainable by the owner. You'll do a conservation report that lists all your materials and processes and may get called in the future, should your piece need some repairs.

Public Art Qualities and Types

WHAT ARE PUBLIC ART QUALITIES?

Representational: Depicts, portrays events, objects or people in a realistic manner. The finished work is recognizable to a broad public.

Abstract: Rather than depicting a specific object or event, abstract art's intellectual and visual effect is created through a relationship of line, color, form, and materials.

Aesthetic: Expresses artist's sense of the beautiful and appeals to people's appreciation of the visually pleasing. The intent is not to be useful or instructive, but to create an effect which arises solely from formal relationships of color, shape, line.

Didactic: Instructs or enlightens. In a public context didactic works might inform, scold, preach, warn, or educate.

Functional: Art that serves a useful purpose besides the aesthetic, entertainment, or contemplative value.

Symbolic: Attributes meaning or significance to people, objects, events, relationships or goals through symbolic associations.

WHAT ARE TYPES OF PUBLIC ART?

Memorial: Commemorates events or people.

Art as Story: Tells us about the history or particular story of a place and its people

Landmark: City or place becomes identified with the representation of an artwork

Art of Personal or Social Expression: moves beyond purely formal or aesthetic values to make personal, social, cultural, and/or historical statements.

Art with a Commercial Purpose: Functional art such as signage or specially-designed street furniture adds vitality, texture and interest to urban landscape, identify business or commercial district:

Artists on Design Team: Artist is involved in conception of site, art may not be separate from site.

Public Art Administrative Process Overview

INTRODUCTION TO THE ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESS OF PUBLIC ART

Typically Boise City staff identifies a public art funding source, identifies an opportunity for public art and its stakeholders, creates a call to artists, releases it to the public, and then artists respond with an application. A panel reviews applicants and chooses finalists or the final artist(s). As an artist you may have questions. Where do you find these opportunities? Who else funds public art and how does where the money come from impact what they are looking for? Are there other administrative processes to being selected as an artist? What else does an artist have to think about when applying or working on a public art project? Some of those questions are answered in this section.

HOW DO YOU FIND OUT ABOUT OPPORTUNITIES?

For Boise check the “opportunities” section on our website at BoiseArtsandHistory.org

Idaho Commission on the Arts lists opportunities

[CAFÉ](#) has multiple call-for-entries nationwide. Register with the system and they will send you regular updates.

See the list in “Resources” section for other websites to peruse.

WHO FUNDS/ADMINISTERS PUBLIC ART PROJECTS?

Local Arts Commissions

Government – City, County, State

Universities

Private Corporations, Businesses, Individuals

HOW ARE PUBLIC ART PROJECTS FUNDED?

It is important to know who is funding the project as they are each interested in different outcomes for the projects

Public Funding: - Special Taxes such as hotel/recreational or tax increment financing (TIF) - Percent for Art programs (allocating a percentage of eligible capital projects for art) are established at a City, State, or County level that sets the framework for an arts in public places program, ensuring that public construction includes public art.

Private: Corporation, Businesses, Private Individuals fund with private dollars

Public/Private Partnerships: Joint funding from multiple partners

WHAT ARE THE MOST TYPICAL CALL-TO-ARTIST METHODS?

Request for Qualifications: - asks for images of past work, image identification, letter of interest, resume - eligibility may be local, regional, national

Request for Proposals: - asks for proposal concept for project, images of past work, image identification, letter of interest, resume - eligibility may be local, regional, national

Invitational: - asks for images of past work, image identification, letter of interest, resume - only open to those asked to participate

WHEN CREATING A PROPOSAL FOR PUBLIC ART, CONSIDER YOUR AUDIENCE

Who is commissioning the piece?

Who uses the space where the work will be?

What businesses, buildings are in the impact area?

How can you involve the community in the conception or construction of your artwork?

Are your materials and craftsmanship going to hold up to weather, vandalism, and time?

ARTIST CONTRACTS

Sign contracts before any work begins

Have a lawyer review the contract if at all possible

Must provide proof of insurance in most cases

PROJECT FACILITATION

Make a timeline of the project

Consider hiring sub-contracting parts of your project

Keep a binder with all project information

Keep in touch with all the players regularly

WORKING WITH ARCHITECTS, LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS, DEVELOPERS & ENGINEERS

Communicate: Learn how different professions work in terms of planning, time schedules, approval process

Start early: If possible, get involved in the process early so there is a level playing field and collaboration can truly happen

Get to know your project manager: Its helpful to have an arts administrator as a middle person to support the artist and to serve as a facilitator/mediator when needed

Rely on Professionals: Involve Architects, Landscape Architects and Engineers as consultants on the project to avoid mistakes (draining, code issues, structural issues, safety)

WARRANTIES & MAINTENANCE OF PUBLIC ART

Maintenance: When creating proposals or actual work, consider possibilities of weather damage and material longevity. Material options? Protections?

Warranty: Artists typically provide a one year warranty on all materials, fabrication, and installation. How do your material and craftsmanship choices impact your one year warranty against defects?

Vandalism: Human intervention is not the artist's responsibility; however, please consider how your design elements will hold up to potential vandals. Are replacement parts available? Are there delicate or removable components that could ultimately cause the demise of your artwork if they are destroyed or not able to be replaced?

Record Keeping: Creating and providing a conservation report with all project specifications is required for final payment, in most instances. Records on paint color, material sources, or fabricators used will help the conservation staff maintain your artwork and solve problems you might have to remedy in the one year warranty period. It will also be helpful to you on future projects and proposals.

PROBLEM SOLVING

Anticipating Problems before They Happen: Process, Process, Process—approvals, keep sponsor of work informed, consult with technical professions, talk to the neighbors near a project, keep a binder with all correspondence, take notes at all meetings, make sure the contract covers everything you can think of, keep to your budget

Dealing with Problems as they Happen: Respond quickly, ethically, consult all parties, remember process, and apologize if necessary.

Building Your Public Art Portfolio

BUILDING EXPERIENCE & PORTFOLIOS FOR PUBLIC ART OPPORTUNITIES

Studio classes: take classes that provide opportunities to create art in public places, work in a team, and develop skills such as making maquettes, budgeting, and building work for outdoors.

Classes in arts administration, business, and computer classes in 3-D modeling, Photoshop and website development

Internships/Mentorships: with practicing public artists, within public art agencies or with art consultants.

References: Who are your references? How can you build more relevant references for public art?

Public Art with Community Groups: Organize a community mural project, work with a non-profit group to do a project in their facility.

Independent Self-Funded Projects: If you did an artist-initiated public art project what would it be? Can you do something in your yard, at the botanical garden, or other outdoor space? How can you make it site-specific? Document your finished project.

Find a Sponsor: Do a detailed proposal for your sponsor on what you would create for them. Make a budget. Create the project.

Identify Fabrication Partners: What type of fabricator(s) would you want to work with?

Volunteer: By offering to help out an artist or commissioning agency, you can learn a lot!

Create Composite Photos for your Portfolio: Visualize how your work would look in a public space.

Seek opportunities to place your work in public sites: Are there temporary public art opportunities that exist or you can create to site your existing work in public places?

Relation to Place: How does your work relate to place? How can you reflect that in a portfolio?

Applying for a Public Art Project

Provide a COMPLETE proposal. Provide everything that is requested.

DO YOUR HOMEWORK

Review printed materials carefully. Is it a request for Qualifications (RFQ) or a Request for Proposals (RFP)? What materials do they want you to prepare for the initial application?

What are the goals and objectives of the project?

What are the criteria the panel will be using to evaluate the initial application?

Visit the site where the project will be located, if possible. Review all visuals and information available.

If it is a RFP (Request for Proposals), research concepts and ideas related to the site, purpose of the space, history, etc. (go to the public or state historical library and look at books, see if there is an archive with material that would be helpful, look for available books on the topic you can buy and study)

If it is a RFP, develop a **site-specific** concept, or if it is an RFQ (past material and artist statement only), relate your work to this particular project or state clearly in your cover letter why you/your work is appropriate for this project.

If it is a RFQ (Request for Qualifications), make sure your images are strong and that they are appropriate for the kind of project/site you are applying for.

DEVELOPING AN ARTIST STATEMENT OR PROPOSAL

Communicate your ideas clearly and simply.

Your statement or artwork/project description should be: concise, coherent, concrete, and well-written

Proof read carefully. Check spelling and grammar.

Have a third party read your letter or proposal and be sure they understand your ideas and intent.

Your application/ proposal (and supporting written materials) needs to:

Address the goals and objectives listed in the RFQ or RFP

Take the specifics of the site, its history, its users, and its context in the community into consideration. Be sure your narrative explains what, how and why your artwork will accomplish the project goals.

Explain how users/audience have experienced your past work or how you anticipate they'd experience your proposed concept. Why/how will your artwork/proposal benefit users/audience/community?

How and why will your artwork/proposal enhance the site?

Explain how and why you (and/or your team) are qualified to accomplish the project (you can do this in a cover letter or in your written statement)

Do whatever you can to help selection panelists visualize your work or project:

Provide a unified package and concept. Your application, proposal and supporting materials reflect your ability as a visual artist. Consider the aesthetics of your proposal.

Image quality (**most important!*)

Supporting visuals are key. Don't be in your work sample photos or have distracting background elements in image. Images should be clean, clear and focus on the art not surroundings.

image list (typed, complete)

details, details, details

drawings (if included for proposal) should be simple and clear

for RFP only, include material samples of work to show material use, color, physicality

General tips regarding narratives (letters of interest, proposal descriptions):

Don't put requested information in the body of your email (resume, letter, or image list); include as an attached word or pdf document.

Indicate in first sentence/paragraph that you've paid attention to purpose of the project and state how your project responds to/answers that purpose

Instead of writing from your perspective in terms of why you want this job or why you are interested in it, write to the ear of the selection panel/public. Why should they be interested in your work?

Address how your work is site-specific or specifically suited for this project

Indicate ways a viewer may experience your work from far away and close up.

Use active, present tense whenever possible. Make it real! Make it now!

Connect your narrative to what they are seeing in your proposal or work samples.

It is helpful to discuss your process for designing, fabricating your work. How do you operate? What kind of research do you do or references do you use?

End on strong, confident note.

Make sure your name and contact information is on your printed material somewhere.

Letter of interest should look like a letter. You are addressing someone who wants to understand why they should choose you.

Include your name on documents to be printed (easy to mix up documents).

Don't include unrelated files, documents on the thumb drive or email you submit.

So Now You're a Finalist

Typically a finalist proposal consists of:

Image(s) of proposed project

Model (optional)

Material Samples (optional)

Images of past work that relate to proposal (optional)

Narrative about project

Budget

All this may be provided in a digital document, PowerPoint, or physical presentation, depending on what the organization requests.

Some things to think about when creating your proposal:

Identify Your Audience: Who will see the work? Who works near it? How are you addressing audiences?

Identify Your Purposes: What themes are you dealing with? What ideas do you want to get across?

Budget: What's the budget of the final artwork? How does this influence what you can do? What do you need to account for? (see sample budget in Resource section)

Collaborative Research: Find information, images to inspire you and draw from. What is your project about? How do you relay the content? What symbols will you use? Will broad audience members understand your symbols? How will your art relate to context?

Brainstorming: Sketch out ideas; explore content and material options; communicate with team members or audience about possibilities.

Mediums: Are you going to work with a medium you know well or experiment with new mediums? Is there a fabricator you might sub-contract with?

Planning: Create working drawings and plans; map out your vision for success; show plans to friends, community members, get feedback; then make alterations.

Vandalism-Proofing/Durability: How can you protect your work from abuse? What materials are resistant to the weather?

Skillset Inventory

Which skills do you have? Which skills do you need to find in a team member or subcontractor?

Have / Need

Y N Administration (writing, application preparation, filing, etc.)

Y N Project Management (hiring subs, tracking timeline, permitting, keeping all in the loop)

Y N External Communication/Promotion (news releases, event planning, social media)

- Y N Website development
- Y N Accountant/budgeting/bid estimation
- Y N Creative visualization (imaging what could be there but isn't yet – yes, this is a skill!)
- Y N Sculpting
- Y N Fine Art Painting
- Y N Illustration/drawing
- Y N Working with Mosaic
- Y N Working with Glass (fused, laminated, stained, painted)
- Y N Graphic design
- Y N Architectural design
- Y N Landscape Architectural design
- Y N Computer Aided Drawing (CAD) or other programs for blueprint production
- Y N Photoshop/Illustrator for computer illustrations
- Y N Working with metals (steel, bronze, aluminum, blacksmithing, etc.)
- Y N Powder Coating Painting (industrial painting)
- Y N Engineering
- Y N Fine Art photography
- Y N Documentary photography
- Y N Community facilitation/engagement
- Y N General construction skills
- Y N Legal skills/knowledge (including contract review, copyright issues, insurance, etc.)
- Y N Working with concrete (footings, concrete pads, constructing with concrete)

Y N Working with electricity, electrical systems

Y N Creating professional signage

Y N Conservation/art maintenance skills

What skills have I missed that you have or need?

Legal and Contractual Issues

The City of Boise can't provide legal advice to the public. What we can do is inform you what you need to be aware of when doing a public art project. I suggest you do your own research into what you need to know and how these areas might affect you as an artist. Here are the areas to look into:

What it means to sign a contract and related obligations [Review an example of a public art contract here \(link to PDF of contract example\).](#)

Insurance needs

Copyright and Fair-Use issues

Visual Artists Rights Act (VARA) of 1990

Americans for the Arts Public Art Network Council's Best Practices for Public Art Projects

Statement of Purpose

Throughout the United States, agencies and organizations have been using art to expand constituents' experience of the public realm. With so many entities involved in managing public art projects in varying manners, the Public Art Network Council and Americans for the Arts established these proposed Best Practices out of a desire to establish a baseline for public art practices. The starting place, or baseline stage, must provide general principles that are equally relevant and agreeable to administrators, artists and other public art professionals. Once established, the baseline will provide a framework for more in-depth conversations to tease out the more complex underlying issues.

This more detailed exchange will clarify instances where different players in the public art field have diverse interests or specific pressures dictating their particular viewpoint.

By parsing and articulating these diverse perspectives, the baseline principles will be annotated to provide a multi-dimensional look at public art practices.

These Proposed Best Practices are specifically drafted with discourse in mind. It is true that enforcement at this point can only be achieved through peer opinion, but Best Practices Standards will be a great resource for both developing and maturing programs. Administrators, artists and other public art professionals will be able to point to clear Best Practice Standards that have been developed and approved on a national level designed specifically to assist in the development, drafting and execution of public art policy at the local level.

Goals Are:

To approve Best Practices Standards recognized as the national standard by AFTA/PAN.

Disseminate the approved Best Practices Standards through AFTA's outreach and supportive communication from Robert L. Lynch, President and CEO of AFTA.

Programs that adopt and follow these Best Practices Standards will be recognized by AFTA/PAN.

A committee comprised of PAN Council members and general members shall meet regularly to discuss and draft annotated language to accompany these Best Practices Standards.

Communications to AFTA/PAN membership regarding amendments and developments in the Best Practices Standards will be regularly disseminated to the AFTA membership and public art community.

Defined Terms

Administrator: includes public art administrators, public art program representatives, art consultants, developers and any other person or team working on behalf of a commissioning body or entity.

Agreement: includes any written agreement pertaining to the planning, design, development, fabrication, delivery and/or installation of an Artwork, including but not limited to letters of intent (LOIs), memoranda of understanding (MOUs), commission agreements, contracts and construction agreements.

Artist: includes individual artists as well as artist teams.

Artwork: unless otherwise restricted by the language of the particular statement, and excluding ancillary deliverables such as budgets and maintenance manuals, "Artwork"

includes any permanent and/or temporary work as defined in the scope of work of an Agreement.

Proposed Best Practices for Public Art Projects

Administrators should clearly represent the scope and budget of project in calls for Artists and communications with Artists.

Artists should truthfully represent their role and the nature of past work when presenting their portfolios for consideration.

Artists should design to the available budgets, and make proposals for what they can realistically deliver for the available funding, especially during a design competition.

Administrators/Consultants should not ask Artists to appropriate or use design solutions proposed by other Artists in a competition (i.e. cherry pick from among other competitors). Nor should Artists use other Artists' ideas or concepts proposed during the course of the same competition.

Any organization or entity commissioning Artwork should pay Artists to create design proposals.

Administrators should ensure a legal and fair process for developing projects and selecting Artists.

All organizations and entities commissioning Artwork should consider their process for developing projects and selecting Artists in light of the principles set forth in AFTA's Statement on Cultural Equity.

To whatever extent reasonably possible and consistent with existing privacy policies and legal requirements, Agencies should protect Artists' private information.

Arts professionals should be involved in the Artist selection process.

Administrators/Consultants should not receive money from Artists being considered or awarded a project.

In order to avoid actual conflict or the appearance of impropriety, real or perceived conflicts of interest should be disclosed. Decision-makers impacted by the real or perceived conflict should abstain from involvement in the portion of the process.

All projects should have a written Agreement that includes at a minimum a clear articulation of: scope of work, budget and schedule.*

All parties should have adequate time to read and understand agreements prior to signing, and if they so desire, to seek legal and/or business counsel.

Agreements should clearly articulate the process by which project changes are approved.

Any changes to Agreements should always be made in writing.

If substantial redesign of a contracted artwork or an entirely new proposal is requested due to no fault of the Artist, the Artist should be compensated for the additional work.

Realistic life span of an Artwork should be mutually agreed by all parties and clearly written into the Agreement.

Artists should choose appropriate materials for a project based on the expected life span of the Artwork. Care should be taken when integrating components into the Artwork that are not warranted for the minimum warranty period required of Artists in the Agreement. Attention should be paid to application of integrated components that may void underlying warranties.

Artist warranties should not exceed two years.

With regard to manufacturer warranties for integrated components, Artists should be required to only pass along those warranties provided by the manufacturer.

Where reasonable, obtainable insurance is required by law, municipal policy and/or in an Agreement, Administrators should work with Artist to assess the true cost of this insurance so that Artists can include the cost in their budget. Because only licensed professionals can obtain professional liability insurance and/or errors and omission coverage, Artists, who are not otherwise licensed professionals, should not be required to provide such insurance. However, Agreements may require licensed sub-contractors to carry professional liability or errors and omissions insurance.

Administrators should not ask Artists to take on unreasonable or inappropriate liability.

Artists should have Agreements with their subcontractors, and include all relevant requirements of the prime contract in the sub-contract Agreement.*

Project payment schedule should meet the cash flow needs of the Artwork schedule of deliverables.

Artists should retain copyright to their Artwork. However, Artists should expect to grant license to the contracting agency or ultimate owner for reasonable use of images of the Artwork for publicity, educational, and reasonable promotional purposes or other uses upon which the parties mutually agree.

Artists and commissioning bodies and/or owners should provide reciprocal credit for their respective roles in commissioned Artworks whenever appropriate and practicable.

Maintenance and conservation plans should be discussed and mutually agreed upon by the parties. Based on such mutual agreement, Artists should create and deliver a detailed and feasible maintenance and conservation plan.

Commissioning bodies and/or ultimate owners should have collection management policies in place and notify Artists of these policies.

If an Artwork is damaged, Administrators should make a good faith effort to consult the Artist regarding the repair process. Administrators are not under obligation to work with Artists to make repairs, but should always employ best conservation practices.

If Visual Artist Rights Act (VARA) rights, as found in 17 U.S.C. §106A, are waived, Agreements should nonetheless provide that, in the event of damage, alteration, or destruction of an Artwork that is not remedied to Artist's satisfaction, or relocation without Artist's approval of Artwork that is not inherently portable, if the Artist believes the Artwork no longer appropriately represents his/her work, the Artist should have the right to remove his/her name from the Artwork.

*Look at the Public Art Network resources available on the Americans for the Arts website for sample documents.

Re-imagining Public Art

Public Art (Now), an organization in Bristol, UK, reimagines what public art can be and where it can happen in this blog: *The New Rules for Public Art*. These new rules are true in Boise too. To see their website and the list visit: <http://publicartnow.com/2013/12/12/the-new-rules-of-public-art/>

Education and Support

Boise City Department of Arts & History's Public Art Academy (PAA) is offered for 8 weeks in February/March (meeting once a week). Applications are available in December. Up to 20 students accepted for this free course. There is a public art opportunity only available to PAA students, which they compete for as part of the course.

Book: *The Artist's Guide to Public Art: How to Find and Win Commission*, by Lynn Basa, Allworth Press, 2008 is a great resource (used as textbook for PAA).

National Public Art Resources and Organizations

[Americans for the Arts Public Art Network](#) A national advocacy organization, the Public Art Network (PAN) Council has many resources about the field including best practices, public art examples to look at, books for sale, sample documents, and resource information.

[Public Art Review Magazine](#)

A magazine published by Forecast dedicated exclusively to public art.

[Forecast Public Art](#) A non-profit arts organization that connects the energies and talents of artists with the needs and opportunities of communities, guiding our partners in creating public art that expresses the community's sense of place and pride.

[Public Art Dialogue](#) (PAD) An organization devoted to public art. PAD was founded on the premise that dialogue is the essential element in all effective public art endeavors.

[International Sculpture Center](#) A member-supported, nonprofit organization founded in 1960 to champion the creation and understanding of sculpture and its unique, vital contribution to society.

International Resources and Organizations

[Creative City Network of Canada - Public Art Network](#) The Creative City Network of Canada is committed to connecting everyone involved in public art such as artists, public art officers, curators, conservators, installation crews, foundries, private donors, businesses and citizens to raise the level of Public Art practice in communities across Canada.

[ixia](#) A UK-based public art think tank who provides guidance on the role of art in the public realm.

[Public Art Online](#) A UK-based online resource for all of Europe.

[Public Art \(Now\)](#) A UK-based public art organization is a national program of talks, films, publications and workshops, devised by Situations with our partners, dedicated to showcasing new forms of public art.

[European Network of Public Art Producers](#) (ENPAP) A European-based organization who aim is to raise criticality in public art commissioning practice through a mutually beneficial network. The network promotes knowledge exchange, developments in new working methods and establishes a common vocabulary for new forms of production and public engagement across contemporary art.

Other Ways to Get Connected

In addition to the provided resources and organizations, reading articles about public art online can provide insight into new programs, current issues facing the field and potential upcoming calls for artists. Finding articles on public art can be done by setting up [Google Alerts](#) or a [Yahoo! Alert](#), which can be set up to scan the Internet for public art related articles and be sent to your email account on a regular basis.