

# Guiding Questions for the Development of a Public Art Program



The number of public art programs in the US continue to grow with interest spreading from urban centers to mid-size cities to rural areas. A 2017 survey of public art programs found that 44 percent of the responding programs have started since 2000. With the upward growth of programs and continued interest in developing public art projects, it is essential that communities consider what it means to commission, manage and collect public artworks.

This document provides a list of questions to help guide the beginning discussions needed to create the structure of a public art program. Use the following questions to reflect on the who, why and how public art will be implemented within your community.

The questions are broken out into seven different sections to help you consider some of the overarching topics and issues that will need to be addressed to create a successful program. For resources on specific topics, visit the Public Art Resource Center at [www.AmericansfortheArts.org/PARC](http://www.AmericansfortheArts.org/PARC).

Where possible, consider bringing in a consultant who is knowledgeable and experienced in public art and program development. For public art consultants, visit the Public Art Service Directory at [www.AmericansfortheArts.org/PASD](http://www.AmericansfortheArts.org/PASD).

This document was developed in collaboration with the 2018 [Public Art Network \(PAN\) Advisory Council](#). The PAN Council is made up of leaders in the field, both administrators and artists, who are deeply knowledgeable and skilled in public art program development and project management.

## Guiding Questions

### Goals and Governance

Having overall goals or a mission is critical to the healthy development of a public art program. As the program is developed, it will need to be clear who makes the decisions and how a program can enhance communities. Consider these questions when looking to develop a new program.

- Why is public art important to the community?
- Is the community accustomed to public art and is public art being requested by the community?
- What role will a public art program play within the community?
- What will be the mission or vision of the public art program?
- For municipal agencies, where does public art fit into the local governmental structure, such as an arts and culture department or a parks and recreation department? How will adding a public art program support the overall goals or vision within a department, or will it be a separate department?
- How will the program be governed? For example, is there an appointed arts commission or a board committee? What are their responsibilities and objectives?

## Funding

How to financially sustain a public art program or fund a public art project are vital questions in the field. Funding can come from sources such as a percent-for-art policy, a municipal's general fund, donations, grants and more. Regardless of how a program or project will be funded here are questions to think about while setting up a program.

- How will the public art program be funded in the short and long-term? Will the funding source be consistent or subject to fluctuation?
- How will funds be set aside for projects that take more than one fiscal year to implement?
- How will funding sources be used to maintain and if necessary, to deaccession a work within the collection (See below Maintenance and Conservation).

## Program Administration

The administration of a public art program has unique challenges and requires distinctive support. How programs are administrated are as unique as the communities that the program serves. Here are a few questions to consider how a program will be supported and managed.

- Will there be staffing to support the implementation of the program? What are their roles and responsibilities? Do they have previous experience working with construction projects?
- What are the number of anticipated annual projects and is there enough staff to manage both the program and the projects?

## Project Management

The management of a public art project requires a wide variety of knowledge and skills from construction to artist's rights and community meeting facilitation. When considering who will manage a project and how a project will be managed, think about the questions below.

- What is the process for how projects are scoped, prioritized and selected? Who is involved and what are the priorities for making these decisions?
- What is the process for the selection of the artist or artists for a project? Who is involved in the selection process?
- Who is responsible for administrating and signing contracts and payments to artists and vendors? Do they have experience in the management of artists contracts?
- Who will review the artwork for compliance with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and other building codes?
- What municipal agencies might be involved with the permitting of projects?

## Community and Local Artists Engagement

Working with your community is one of the most important aspects of creating a successful public art program. From who is invited to participate in the public art process to why public art is being funded in

their neighborhood, community members and local stakeholders are key to the success of a public art program. Consider the following questions when developing a program.

- What is the plan for community engagement, including outreach to diverse or underserved populations? Who is responsible for the plan?
- How will local artists be engaged with the public art program? Will there be opportunities to support local artists such as trainings and specialized projects?
- How is the community involved in the artists' selection process?
- What is the method to ensure the public art program and projects reflect and respond to the community or environment?

### Maintenance and Conservation

Maintaining and conserving public art is as critical as the implementation of a new artwork. Consider these questions when starting a program for long-term success as your public art collection grows.

- What is the process for the maintenance and conservation of the public art? Who is involved in the process?
- How is the maintenance and conservation funded? Is the funding source consistent and sustainable or will it fluctuate?
- If a work needs to be removed, what is the process for deaccessioning a work within the collection?

### Collection Management

Managing a public art collection is unique and has many moving parts. Somewhat like managing a gallery or museum collection, public artworks come with a series of specific needs. Consider these questions when developing a public art program to help track and coordinate your collection.

- What is the process for managing and tracking current and new public artworks? Who is responsible for managing and tracking completed public artworks?
- Is there an inventory of existing artworks, monuments etc. that the city might have acquired over time, and what are the expectations for managing these artworks?
- What is the process for evaluating the relevancy of existing artworks? Who is responsible for that process?

*Need to discuss the growth of your public art program or the development of a project? Contact Americans for the Arts Public Art Network at [pan@artsusa.org](mailto:pan@artsusa.org) or (202) 371 – 2830.*