

SECTION 2: DEVELOPING A PROPOSAL

Site Evaluation Process

The site evaluation process is an important step in developing your proposal. Whether you can actually visit the site or not, the following suggestions and questions will help you understand a potential public art site and determine limitations or opportunities that may affect your proposal concept.

Create A Site Inventory

1. *General Site Components.* What are the colors, shapes, textures, etc. that are already near or on the site? Is there a balance about the site, or is there an obvious imbalance that an artwork might help alleviate? Would your proposed artwork be dwarfed on this site or would it overpower the existing elements? Are there other sculptures or decorative forms, such as entryways, gateways, furniture, or light poles that have a particular style? If so, is the style something you can respond to, or can it be a complimentary element with your art style?

2. *Light.* How does the sunlight, shade or other lighting influence the site? How does the sunlight or shade change the space through the course of the day and throughout the year with the seasonal changes? Is the lighting affected by trees that will lose leaves in winter and provide shade in the summer? If it is an interior space, is the lighting sufficient or would additional lighting be needed? Is the existing interior lighting complimentary to the color tones of your artwork? Is there a need for nighttime lighting? Is it available to you?



*Poets' Plaza, Cassandra Reid
Harwood Art Center
7th & Mountain NW*

3. *Air Flow.* How does the air flow at the site? Does it create any sort of vortex or a breezeway that may affect the structural stability of an artwork?

4. *Topography.* What is the topography of the site? Are there shifts in grade levels? If so, are the shifts natural or artificial? Can the grade be changed to accommodate an artwork, or can the artwork accommodate the grade changes? Is the site surrounded by hard surfaces or soft surfaces? Do those surfaces invite gathering or do they discourage traffic flow?

5. *Water.* How does water flow over the site? Is there drainage or does water collect in certain areas?

6. *Landscape.* How is the site landscaped? What affect will irrigation on the site have on your artwork? Are there creative details and patterns that are visible? What are the climate and seasonal changes like?

7. *Infrastructure.* What types of infrastructure are located at the site or nearby? Electric, water, drainage/ sewer, irrigation? Are they above ground or underground? Can these utilities be accessed during construction or integrated permanently into the artwork? Where exactly is the public right-of-way? Is there seating, benches, or low walls to encourage viewing? Is the site ADA ([Americans with Disabilities Act](#)) accessible?

Site Evaluation Process, continued

Determine Site Uses

1. Next you'll want to consider the uses of the site or building. Who will go there? How many people will be there? How often and for how long? What might their frame of mind be when they visit? Does that matter when they view your artwork? Will your artwork be climbed upon?
2. What directions do people travel around the site? Do they walk, bicycle, skateboard, drive, fly? The angle from which they are most likely to view your artwork may help you determine how you want to position your art on the site.
3. Are there other activities that happen at the site other than what is regularly programmed there? If so, what are those activities?
4. Is the site historically significant? What is the history of the surrounding area? Is that important to your artwork concept? Will your artwork potentially offend any segment of the site's population?



Poets' Plaza (after landscaping), Cassandra Reid
Harwood Art Center
7th & Mountain NW



Five Stones of Elena Gallegos, Billie Walters
Elena Gallegos Open Space
Simms Park Road east of Tramway NE



Fish Globe, Colette Hosmer
Tingley Beach
1800 Tingley Drive

Working with Communities

There are various ways that the public may be involved in a public art project. The public may initiate a project, or may become involved during the artist selection process. Sometimes the artist may invite the public to become involved in the creative or construction process. The best approach is to involve the community at the appropriate level, which will vary from project to project. By using many of the checklist questions in this handbook, you can determine to what level you will be working with the community. You can also rely on the public art project administrator to help guide you in this area.

When working in an urban neighborhood, there are many dynamics that can affect the level of community involvement. If the area has an active neighborhood association and remains involved in other community issues, you can expect them to be very interested in public art. Neighborhood leaders may provide useful resources that can help your public art project.

Artists should consider utilizing the assistance of community participants; interested neighbors may volunteer to help organize the dedication ceremony once the project is done, and business contacts may be willing to subcontract certain services at a special rate. Be very careful to balance their involvement with your efforts so that you remain in control over the artistic process. Your first commitment is to the commissioning agency and the committee that selected you for the projects. Public art project administrators can help you navigate these areas, too.



Migrating Home, Susan Linnell
with neighborhood students
San Mateo north of Lomas NE



Convention Center Mural, Cassandra Reid
and students from the Art Summer Institute
Albuquerque Convention Center
2nd & Tijeras NW

Similar situations exist when working in rural communities. You may find it easy to identify community leaders, other art resources and smaller government agencies who will be eager to assist you in your project. Small towns often have ways of pulling together resources that sometimes larger communities cannot. But just as each public art project is different, communities can vary in terms of how desirable they are to include in your project. Get to know the community and its resources before you submit your final proposal.

Collaborating with Other Artists and Professionals

You may want to explore collaborating with other artists or design, fabrication and construction professionals. Collaboration and joint proposal submissions have become increasingly popular for very large scale public art projects where the scope of the project requires licensed design professionals and the consultation of highly, technically skilled individuals. Collaboration can also be very successful on small-scale projects where artists who are willing to try new ideas and processes join together to create a new form of creative expression.



La Compuerta, Hank Saxe and Cynthia Patterson
Los Griegos Community Center
Candelaria & 12th Street NW



Sleuth, Howard and Kathleen Meehan
Metropolitan Forensic Science Center
5450 2nd Street NW

When considering collaboration or partnering with others, you should weigh the differences both financially and creatively between submitting a proposal together with equal billing, or submitting the proposal under one lead artist's name. In the case of being a lead artist, the others are acting in a subcontracting capacity. If you are going to be the lead artist and subcontract with others, you may have to pay additional employment taxes or provide additional insurance coverage for them. While these are additional expenses, they offer you the advantage of maintaining the creative lead. Equally creative partnerships usually recognize the work of each person involved.

Whether you participate in an equal partnership with a joint proposal or if you elect to subcontract others, you should have the terms of the relationship spelled out very clearly when you enter into the working relationship. Public art projects may take several years to complete. Be sure that you will be able to maintain the original relationship throughout the duration of the project. Check the credentials of the other artists or design/fabrication professionals and be sure that you are confident with the quality of their work. It is advisable to consider a formal subcontract agreement with each individual you work with. Pulling creative resources together can be very inspirational and great projects can be achieved, but clearly defined roles should be negotiated ahead of time to eliminate the possible failure of a project.

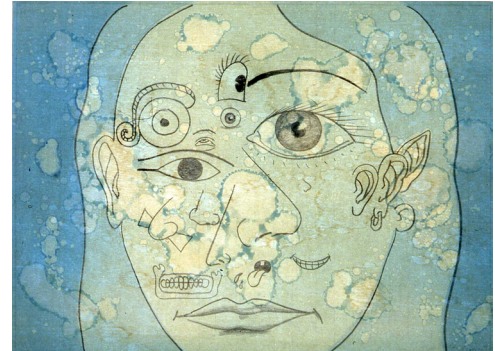
Getting Your Ideas Across

Depending on the type, budget and scale of a project, or the abilities of a commissioning agency, you may be asked to submit a preliminary proposal initially or as a finalist. In either case, art selection committees often include individuals with limited art experience. Take the time to make your proposal concept as clear as possible so that committee members can better envision your artwork.

When working on a Letter of Intent or Interest, express your idea for the project with conviction, imagination, and focused language. Start with the basics: size, shape, color, texture, and materials. Is the project completely stationary or does it involve moving, flowing, or kinetic parts? People need a simple description of your artwork to be able to see it in their imaginations.



Kick Flip Sequence, Michael Whiting
Northwest Quadrant Skate Park
Seven Bar Loop & Coors Bypass NW



Untitled (Blue Head), Enrique Chagoya
Main Library
Copper & 5th NW

Describe the relationship of your art to the site or immediate environment. Does it reflect the built environment or the natural environment? How? With color, shape, texture, style, content? If describing a specific style, you may want to reference an historical period, famous artist or other known references if it is applicable. If describing a new process, be as thorough as possible, yet brief. Don't spend too much time on technical details.

Is a sketch or drawing required with your submission? Make sure your written description accurately describes your drawing. Show different angles of your proposed artwork, use color and draw to scale. Remember, you are trying to communicate what you already see in your mind.

Most committees review several proposals in only a few hours. This includes reading the proposal, resume, and supporting materials, reviewing images and discussion. A clear, focused proposal and high-quality images will help your work stand out.

We suggest you ask a friend or mentor to read your entire proposal. Ask them to describe to you what you intend to do as your public art project. This will help you see where the gaps in your description occur.

Developing a Budget

Not all prospectuses require a project budget, but you should understand how to put one together. This is to help you clarify your costs as much as to help the selection committee. How do you realistically estimate the costs of a project while assuring the selection committee they are getting their money's worth?



Pentaceratops Sternbergii, David Thomas
AKA "Spike"
Natural History Museum
1801 Mountain Road NW

Materials. What are the types and quantities of the materials you will need? Do you have to buy them or can you use existing inventory? Are there shipping or transportation costs to get your materials to your studio or workshop, or to the site?

Transportation. How will you move the project to the site? Will you have to rent a truck, trailer, crane, moving company, etc?

Travel. How often will you need to go to the site? Will you need overnight accommodations for site visits and when transporting your artwork?

Supplies. What other types of supplies will you need to complete your project? Consider graphic materials for presentations, photo documentation, postage, shipping, utilities and tools at the site.

Insurance. What are the exact insurance requirements of the commissioning agency? What will the premiums be for such coverage? If the insurance requirements are not described in the prospectus, ask for specifics. See our [Public Art Resources](#) webpage links to helpful websites.

Taxes. Will you be responsible for backing out gross receipts tax from the project amount? If so, what is the specific rate? See Section 3, *Taxes* for more information. Note: Federal income tax should be left out of your submitted budget as that is calculated on the amount which is deemed actual income, or profit, you make in a whole year. Since it varies from person to person, don't just assume that you will have to pay 20% of the public art project and deduct it from the overall budget.

Professional consultation or services. Will you need to consult with an engineer, attorney or accountant to help with your project? Will you need to work with specialists on materials that you are not familiar with, i.e. ceramic tiles, concrete, plumbing, painting? Will you need to hire some help with a large-scale task?

Artist Fee. How much will you earn? A realistic budget includes some form of compensation to the artist. The terms *artist's fee*, *design fee*, or *artistic design* are used to describe the portion that the artist receives for their creative work. Will you pay yourself by the hour? Do you have a set percentage you would like to receive? Do you charge by the square inch? Is your design time worth more than your fabrication time? Are they the same? Is the visibility of the project worth more than the dollar amount?

Developing a Budget, continued

Proposing a budget that falls short of the set dollar amount for the project will usually not result in a more favorable review. The project committee or administrators have set that amount of money aside, so use it. Budget wisely for the best possible art you can for the entire amount, reserving some of the budget for contingencies, such as an unexpected rise in the cost of materials, or other unforeseen costs. Once a contract is signed, you are legally obligated to provide the artwork at the budgeted amount by the specified deadline. Don't plan to lose money on the project just to get the commission. This is not good business sense for the artist or the commissioning agency. Public art programs are designed to create positive economic opportunities for artists as well as to provide artful experiences for the public, so plan your budget accordingly.

Putting Together Strong Proposal Materials

Whether you intend to pursue a project individually or with another artist, your proposal must be strong to get the commission. You have invested the time to source out the project, visit the site, confer with the specialists, and you can envision the finished artwork in your mind. Take the time to polish your presentation. The quality of your proposal materials (image documentation, letter of intent, etc.) will affect the evaluation of your proposal.

While materials need not be flashy and expensive, attention to detail and neatness is important. A well organized, easy to follow proposal with well constructed supporting materials will help convey more than just your creative idea. They will convey a sense of professionalism, capability and sincerity that is needed in order to successfully complete a public art project.



Gordon Church, Leo Neufeld
Public Art Program Manager, 1980-2004
City Hall, 7th Floor

- Follow all instructions and pay attention to the details of the prospectus. Send what is asked for. If you are a sculptural artist and are more comfortable sculpting your idea on a small scale, call the project administrator and ask if it is okay to send a photograph of the maquette instead of a sketch. If you are more at ease with drawings rather than models, ask if you can submit several elevation views of your proposal rather than a model. If the procurement process allows, such requests may be admissible.
- Try to give your materials a look of continuity. Use a simple, easy-to-read format.
- Send a current resume. Does it reflect the best and most interesting things you have done in your art career? Even if your art career is just beginning, your resume should include art experiences that may or may not have been professional such as volunteer projects or special projects at other jobs that specifically involved the arts.

Putting Together Strong Materials, continued

- Check images and image key labeling. (An image key is an annotated list of the pictures you are submitting.) Include your name, title, size, year and medium on your slides. If required, include pricing information on the slide key. Other simple but interesting facts can also be included on the slide key, such as awards for that particular artwork, or the location, especially if the artwork is a public commission.
- Make sure all of your materials can be identified as yours. Include your name, address and phone number on everything. Great images or letters of interest that can't be identified are very frustrating and can have a negative impact on the review once they are identified.
- Check spelling and basic grammar. Typographic errors and lack of clarity detract from creative ideas.
- If you hand deliver your proposal, think about how you want the materials mailed back to you. Will they fit in a standard size envelope? Do they need to have protective inserts to keep photos or drawings from bending? Do you need to supply those items?
- Choose your references wisely. Only use professional, arts-related references; do not ask friends or family.
- References should be able to speak to your professional capacity regarding project management, reliability and thoroughness.
- Do not ask for references or letters of recommendation from an elected official from the government to which you are submitting a proposal. This is a conflict of interest for both of you.



Dreams and Nightmares: Journey of a Broken Weave, Dennis Oppenheim
University of New Mexico campus
Lomas and Stanford NE