MURAL TOOLKIT

MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY™
FRED CARL, JR. SMALL TOWN CENTER

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

As public art has grown in popularity in recent years, small towns have been realizing the potential of murals to transform underutilized public spaces into vibrant community assets. This toolkit is meant to guide you through the process of creating a new mural in your town, from planning and funding to installing and maintaining.

What is a mural?

A mural is a piece of graphic artwork that is painted or otherwise applied directly onto a surface. Murals can be found at a variety of scales and in many forms: building walls, retaining walls, bridge guard rails, sidewalks, and streets are all common canvases for public murals, each lending itself to a unique mural design.

Why have a mural?

Murals have been found to have significant transformative effects for small towns. There are many benefits to having a mural in your community. For example:

- Murals are a relatively easy and low-cost way to improve a space.
- Murals create a heightened sense of place within small towns, promoting a sense of community identity and civic pride.
- Murals allow individuals to have a direct hand in shaping their community.
- Planned public art can discourage vandalism and other anti-social behaviors in public spaces, making the community safer.

What makes a good mural?

Murals that are well-produced and in well-considered locations of course have the most impact, so it is critical to plan your murals carefully. There are several characteristics to keep in mind as you formulate the plan for your mural. Great murals…

- …encourage community participation.
- …have a high-quality and memorable design.
- …are relevant to the community and contextually relevant to the site.
- …are well-maintained.

CASE STUDIES

Sturgis

This mural was designed and installed by the CREATE class at Mississippi State. Students painted the white base coat and used paint as a guide for the stripes of color. They also created stencils for the lettering and magnolia graphic, which were taped to the wall to ensure proper spacing and maximum contact to minimize paint bleeding. What used to be a blank wall is now a mural that beauitfies one of Sturgis's main intersections and welcomes visitors to the town.

Starkville

This linear Starkville mural beautifies an otherwise bland retaining wall alongside a parking lot. The designs for this linear collection of murals were created and implemented by students at Henderson Ward Stewart Elementary School, led by artist April Wallace.

Jackson Utility Boxes

Utility boxes throughout Jackson have become open canvases for different local artists. These murals add welcome pops of color to the city, turning a practical utility item into art.

Vicksburg Flood Wall

This mural is painted on the utilitarian flood wall by Vicksburg's boat launch into the Mississippi River. This mural not only beautifies the concrete structure and walkway along it but also interprets the history and culture of Vicksburg and other communities that grew up along the Mississippi River.

Hattiesburg Art Trail

The Hattiesburg Public Art Trail highlights all of the city's twenty-nine murals (in addition to other public art). The art trail showcases a diverse collection of murals and provides an example of how to turn your public art landscape into a tourist attraction.

West Point Historic Blues Character

This mural - showcasing blues legend Howlin' Wolf - welcomes visitors as they go toward West Point's downtown. This mural follows a typical best practice by highlighting local history and culture, adding to the vibrancy of the place.

METHODS & MATERIALS

GETTING STARTED

Location Selection & Approval

There are several factors to consider when selecting a site for a new mural. A good mural location…

- …is safe and easy to access, both for installation and for later viewing.
- …is highly visible.
- …has a surface that can be thoroughly cleaned and easily prepped for painting.
- …has a surrounding area that will be genuinely enhanced by a mural and where a mural won't cause unnecessary visual clutter.

A few other logistical questions to ask when determining a site include the following:

- What are the ultimate goals of the project? What site would ultimately help us achieve those goals? How would this site fit into goals already established in the community?
- What scale of art are you aiming for (crosswalk, intersection, full street, etc.)?
- Who owns or oversees the site? What entities must be involved in the design and permitting process?
- Does the site have any historical significance or classifications? What does this mean for the approval process?
- What are the existing conditions? How will these conditions affect the design? Do any infrastructural improvements need to be made to the site to make it possible to paint?
- Will the site require any safety precautions (such as traffic control) during installation?

Once these questions have been answered, you should be well on your way to securing the site. Gather all necessary documentation for approval as specified by your city, the building owner, or any other decision-making parties, and secure all permissions and permits necessary to move forward with your mural project.

Assembling a Team

Ideally, the project team will consist of a leading party to manage the project as well as representatives from each entity collaborating on the project. Those leading the project will manage scheduling, budgets, and make any final decisions on the project, while collaborators will ensure that all relevant parties have a say in the design and implementation of the project. Team members may include:

- Group proposing the project
- Site owner(s)
- Whichever government department and/or community organization oversees public art installation in your town
- Community members who live, work, or own businesses near the mural site
- Artist or designer creating the design for the mural

Establishing a Schedule

A critical step at the beginning of a mural project is establishing deadlines for design and implementation as well as a timeline of milestones to achieve these deadlines. The scale of the project will certainly determine a lot of the timeline, but also take into consideration local factors that may determine certain deadlines or milestones, such as weather, holidays, or other important events.

For example, the Southern climate generally tends to have a very hot and rainy spring/summer followed by dry fall months -- with this in mind, you may want to plan for installation during the fall to avoid extreme heat or wet conditions. Be sure to check the local seasonal weather conditions for your area when planning out your timeline.

Another local consideration is seasonal tourism. For example, your town may have an annual festival that draws in lots of visitors, or you may have a college or university in your town that makes traffic busier in the fall/spring. With that in mind, you may want to schedule your asphalt art installation for a time that is less busy in town or try to align the completion and reveal of a project with the start of an annual event to showcase the new art for visitors.

Overall, your schedule should act as a to-do list of tasks for coordinating with collaborators. Consider the following typical tasks as you outline your schedule:
- Identify partners and stakeholders
- Evaluate the site
- Establish a budget
- Select an artist/designer
- Meet with local government (if needed)
- Engage the local community for feedback
- Develop finalized design
- Develop construction documents
- Acquire permits
- Purchase supplies and materials
- Installation event preparation/staging
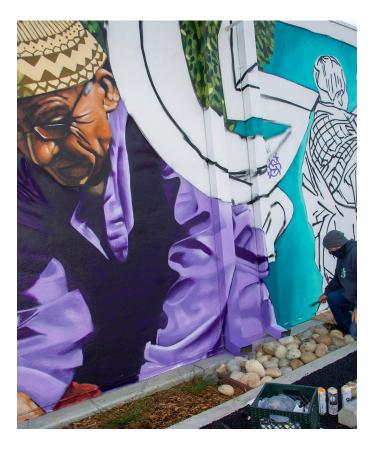- Create maintenance and evaluation plans

Artists Selection & Design Review

1. Call for Artists

If seeking out an artist or designer for the project, it's essential to send out a call for artists. This call should outline the following details for potential artists:

- Project overview/scope of work
- Design goals
- Specifications (dimensions, pre-selected color palette, etc.)
- Timeline
- Estimated budget
- Application requirements

Involving local artists can also open doors to getting additional funding from local and state arts organizations, so prioritizing local artists could be a prudent financial move in addition to being the best possible way to reflect local artistic character.

2. Reflecting Local Character

Cultural identity and public art are mutually influential -- public art can (and should!) influence public art, and public art can influence and enhance a place's cultural identity.

The influence of cultural identity on public art can be seen in many "traditional" examples of public art, such as memorials and monuments to influential figures and events. This type of memorialization and commemoration of a place's history is an intuitive subject for public art, as art made for the public should be created with the intention of connecting to a place and its people.

On the other hand, public art provides an opportunity to influence cultural identity and assist in placemaking. This is especially significant when it comes to amplifying the voices of historically underrepresented groups.

For example, in more contemporary iterations of public art, there has been increased focus on not only telling previously untold stories through art but also highlighting the work and style of indigenous, African American, and other artists who belong to cultural minority groups. Creating a space for these artists to make their cultural art styles part of the public landscape is a way for public art to enhance cultural identity and tell the complete story of a place.

In planning for public art, attention should be paid to a place's cultural identity. Public art is meant for the public and should be created with the public in mind. The more a piece speaks to a place's cultural identity, the more the public will relate to and engage with a piece.
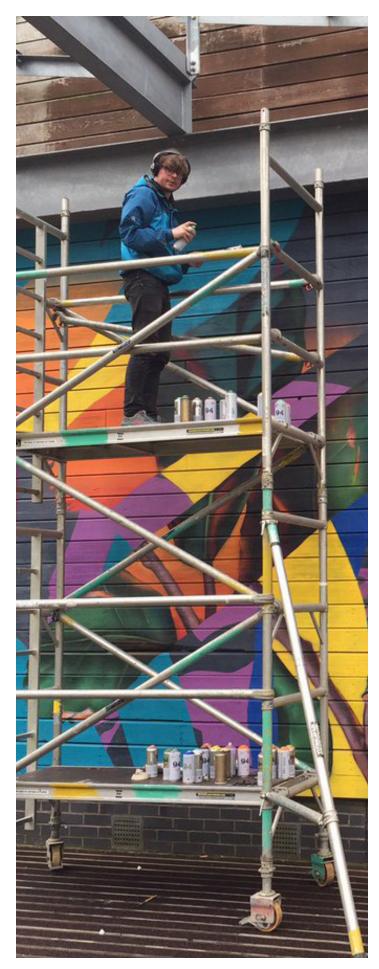
Artists Selection & Design Review Cont.

3. Review & Approval

Some back-and-forth between the project team and the artist/designer is to be expected before approval. These reviews should be intended to ensure that the design meets all stated project goals as well as reflects the design character desired by the project team and the community. If needed, additional community feedback on the proposed design could be gathered during this phase.

Once the project team has reviewed the design and come to a consensus, detailed construction documents can be prepared and approved by the team. These documents can then be pushed through the appropriate channels to get full approval from the city and other officials as necessary.

MATERIALS LIST

Painting Supplies

o   Paint that is specifically suited for adhering to the chosen application surface (ex: concrete, stucco, brick, wood, etc.)

o   AlumiGraphics is an alternative to paint - this product can be printed with any design and simply stuck to a surface (or easily peeled off!)

o   Stencil(s) either from a custom vinyl stencil shop or DIY stencils made using cardboard or other available materials

o   Tape (painters' tape, duct tape, etc.) for marking out designs and ensuring crisp lines

o   Chalk for initial design layouts before taping

o   Ruler/tape measure for measuring design layouts and for use as a straight edge

o   Paint rollers + brushes in various sizes (large for large areas, small for edging and details) for smooth paint application

o   Paint mixer (paint sticks, drill attachment, etc.) for prepping buckets of paint

o   Paint pans for holding paint and dipping brushes

o   Spill protection (drop cloths, tarps, sheets of cardboard, etc.) to keep paint off unwanted areas (grass, sidewalks, unpainted asphalt, etc.)

o   Ladders or scaffolding if needed to reach the top portions of the design

o   Rags for cleanup

o   Trash bags to collect used roller covers, used tape, and other waste after painting

Miscellaneous Supplies

o   Utility vehicle for transporting materials

o   Signage to advertise and organize your event

o   T-shirts for volunteers

o   Volunteer waivers + pens

o   Reference images of the design

o   Tents for shade

o   Tables to hold any volunteer paperwork, pens, extra supplies, personal belongings, etc.

o   Fans for cooling stations (if needed)

o   Water in a cooler for volunteers

o   Entertainment for the event

INSTALL

Site Prep

Before painting can begin, the site must be prepared for installation. Keep the following pointers in mind as you prep the site:

- Clear the site of any hazards and set up tents and tables for volunteers if needed.
- Thoroughly clean the painting surface.
- Fill any cracks or grooves in the surface.
- Prime the surface as necessary based on the base material to help the mural paint adhere.
- If the surface is not already neutral, create a neutral base with a coat of white paint.

Painting

There are four common methods of transferring your mural design onto the surface:

1. Measured grid: the most simple and effective method, it ensures proportions and layout will be correct.
2. Projection: use a projector to outline the projected design onto the prepared surface.
3. Stencil: use custom vinyl or cardboard stencils to apply any precise shapes or lettering if needed.
4. Drawing freehand: if your mural involves large areas of color, or if you're improvising, let your team use their imagination and see what happens.

If you are working with an artist, they will lead this process using their preferred methods.

MAINTENANCE

Depending on site conditions such as exposure to the elements, a mural can last anywhere from 3-5 years before needing any major touch ups. You may want to establish a schedule for regularly cleaning your mural to maintain the vibrancy of the colors, or just wait until touch ups become visibly necessary.

Establishing who will be responsible for maintenance of the project in the future is also crucial. This could be the organization that originally proposed the project, a municipal department, or a community group established for the sole purpose of being stewards for the art. No matter what party is designated for this stewardship, ensure that they have full access to any additional supplies left over after initial installation, as well as any information such as paint colors and construction documents that they might need for future reference while conducting maintenance.

FUNDING RESOURCES

There are many grants available for towns seeking public art. A few that may be relevant to your community are listed here.

- Mississippi Arts Commission Grants
  https://arts.ms.gov/grants/

- National Endowment for the Arts Grants [see: "Our Town" and "Grant for Art Projects"
  https://www.arts.gov/grants

- South Arts Community & Organization Grants
  https://www.southarts.org/community-organization-grants

- Mississippi Main Street Community Development Grants
  https://www.msmainstreet.com/services

- Percent-for-Art Program
  https://artsandplanning.mapc.org/percent-for-art/

- AARP Community Challenge
  https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/community-challenge/

- America Walks Community Change Grant
  https://americawalks.org/programs/community-change-grants/

- Project for Public Spaces Community Placemaking Grants
  https://www.pps.org/community-placemaking-grants

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