A Framework for Public Art and Design

Public Art Policy Initiative
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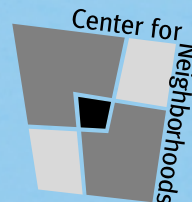
Center for Neighborhoods

from the Center for Neighborhoods

What makes a city memorable? While a strong economy, clean air and natural resources rank high, many people choose to live, work, play or visit a place for its **cultural ambience**. Walk through the teeming streets of unforgettable cities like San Francisco, Boston, Brussels or Seattle and you are greeted with sights and sounds that leave an indelible impression. The liveliness of street performers. The impact of elegant sculpture. The awe of a boulevard lined with art, fountains, festivals. The arts build our **sense of civic pride** and enrich the quality of our lives. That's the given.

What's taken for granted is how public art manifests. Unlike the magical effect it has on our collective consciousness, there is no magic in siting, commissioning, producing and sustaining public art. It is yeoman's work to coordinate, contract, and if necessary, maintain such a cultural tour de force.

In our region, we have yet to determine policies that guide the public sector's involvement and investment in public art. Scores of government entities, from cities and counties, to parks, libraries and transit authorities work to supervise contracts, provide oversight and perform countless unnamed tasks to bring art—visual and performance—to the public realm. Yet, often, there is **no guiding framework** to help these often overlapping jurisdictions coordinate their efforts. Behind the scenes this means duplication of efforts at best, and failed initiatives at worst. Artists who wish to exhibit, perform and be a part of public art, often face insurmountable obstacles.

And so, in 2001 a task force of community, city, county and regional representatives was created. "It is critical, if we are to make a real and lasting commitment to public art, that we identify a city/county/community vision and partnership," stated Hennepin County Commissioner and task force member Gail Dorfman.

The task force was informed by community input and a broad range of governmental needs and issues. With an awareness of the importance of process and storytelling in the creation of public art, the task force developed a framework to assist the public sector in defining public art policies. By working from a common framework, there can be greater coordination among city, county and regional programs.

Our final product, **The Public Art and Design Framework**, is intended to inspire a new dynamic for funding, leadership and collaboration—strengthening public art as it takes its essential role in our vibrant community.

Gretchen Nicholls
Executive Director, Center for Neighborhoods,
and Chair, Public Art Policy Task Force

What is Public Art?

Publicly accessible original art that enriches the city as it evokes meaning in the public realm. It can be of a variety of forms and takes into consideration the site, its location and context, and the audience. Public art may possess functional as well as aesthetic qualities; it may be integrated or discreet. Artists may work in partnership with other design professionals or members of the community, however, the artist is directly involved in the concept, design, or creation. Performances, installations, events and other temporary expressions are included in this definition.

When power leads man toward arrogance, poetry reminds him of his limitations. When power narrows the areas of man's concern, poetry reminds him of the richness and diversity of his existence. When power corrupts, poetry cleanses, for art establishes the basic human truths which must serve as the touchstone of our judgment.

— JOHN FITZGERALD KENNEDY, 1963

Why Public Art is a
Vital Element of Civic Life

Public art is good business: Strategically planned permanent and temporary projects can stimulate economic growth, generating positive publicity, and improving the appearance of surroundings. Aesthetically enhanced and artistically designed public spaces add value to capital investments, benefiting citizens and businesses.

Public art builds strong communities: The process of siting or initiating an art project brings together individuals from diverse sectors of society. Public artists stimulate and facilitate cooperative efforts, collaborations, and multi-disciplinary initiatives, engaging individuals who often don't have the occasion to work cooperatively, provoking discussion about myriad issues affecting quality of life. When citizens from diverse backgrounds communicate, strong communities evolve.

Public art defines and solidifies a sense of identity: Public art offers unique opportunities to illustrate and respond to changing conditions, such as local history, ethnic diversity, and neighborhood identity, marking the community's cultural and natural history, as well as significant sites. In addition, it can commemorate important events, and memorialize important people.

Public art defines the democratic process: Public art can empower community stakeholders by engaging them in creating the kind of public space they want or need, as opposed to accepting spaces others create for them.

Public art enhances the quality of life: Public art that is successfully integrated into the fabric of the community creates settings for public meaning and cause for public pride. Successful projects can influence the quality of design elsewhere in the community, raising the level of creativity, innovation, attention to detail, visual impact, or user friendliness.

Why Government Entities and Public Agencies Need a Public Art Policy Framework

Government and related agency personnel are often the gatekeepers of the permitting and application process. Many times when projects cross jurisdictions duplication of efforts and confusion ensue. Adopting a flexible public art policy framework can not only streamline the process but also ensure the highest level of quality, by establishing clear criteria for outcomes. Such criteria support the development of artistic talent in the region and build the capacity of artists and other partners participating in the process of creating public art and public space. A broad framework allows for case-by-case decisions, respecting unique circumstances of individual projects.

Framework Overview:
Seven Critical Priorities

Our task force identified the following priorities that help govern public art programs and policies:

Definition: Our task force labored to produce a definition of public art broadened beyond sculptures and murals to include a wide spectrum of products, activities and processes.

Funding: All program planning, activities, administration, maintenance and outreach require identifying and securing ongoing funding.

Planning: Establishing and communicating goals and priorities for public art during annual planning process guarantees that public art and design become integrated into the fabric of community life.

Inter-Agency Cooperation: All cities and jurisdictions should establish reasonable mechanisms for planning and implementing public art programs across boundaries.

Leadership and Community Involvement: Authentic community involvement is critical for success, as is strong public and political stewardship.

Management and Governance: A priority should be placed on securing capable administrative expertise.

Valuing Public Art and Design: What makes public art important to a community varies from place to place and project to project. This document identifies five key characteristics that make public art vital to civic life.

For more information

An additional Public Art Fact Sheet is available by contacting the Center for Neighborhoods.

How to get involved

Please contact us to arrange for:

• Briefings

• Slide presentations

• Facilitated discussions

• Private tours

• Community surveys

• Documentary-style exhibits

• Lists of additional resources

Contact information

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Artwork featured

Cover
Hennepin County mural by Tina Blondell, 2001; the Green Chair Project goes to the Capitol, 1995; Man with Briefcase sculpture by Jonathan Borofsky at General Mills headquarters, 1987.

Page 2
May Day Parade, 1999, by In the Heart of the Beast Puppet and Mask Theatre

Page 3
Artist–designed seating by Leslie Hawk, 1988

Page 4
Harrison Neighborhood Gateway by Jane Frees–Kluth, 1990; Elliot Park Neighborhood mural by Ta–coumba T. Aiken, 1992.