

A vibrant mural of a woman with dark skin and braided hair, wearing bright green glasses and a purple tank top. She is looking directly at the viewer with a slight smile. Her hands are raised to her shoulders, holding thin white lines. The background is a mix of blue, orange, and green, suggesting an outdoor setting. The mural is painted on a wooden surface, with a vertical seam visible down the center.

Making Space for Murals

A mural project guide for
Huntsville/Madison County, Alabama



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Huntsville/Madison County, Alabama

Arts Huntsville, Huntsville, AL 35801

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Special thanks to Eric Forrest - [@hsvphoto](#)

For more information contact publicart@artshuntsville.org

Peter 'Float' Lucker,
**Closer Than You
Think** (Above), 2023

A project of the 2022
Artist-Initiated Program,
funded by the City
of Huntsville and the
National Endowment for
the Arts.

Kim Radford, **This Girl
Can** (Right), 2020.

Commissioned by the
Women's Economic
Development Council and
Arts Huntsville

Photos courtesy of Arts
Huntsville.



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Preface

This **Making Space for Murals** guide is a component of Arts Huntsville's Public Art Program, made available to all with easy online access. These efforts are part of Huntsville's larger, ongoing commitment to enliven public places and engage and inspire residents and visitors alike. Within this guide, you'll discover the essential steps and topics that mural-makers should take into account while planning their mural projects. The recommendations here are culled from best practices of artists and art organizations nationally and internationally.

Let this guide serve as your launch pad to create a beautiful and meaningful mural that will enrich your community. Support a project that you believe in and that will make a positive impact. Become a hub where people gather. Add power to your place. Inspire the next generation of artists, creators, and innovators, and work cooperatively with local policymakers and ask for input from those who have a stake in the mural's success.

Sincere thanks go out to all the mural-makers and mural supporters who set standards, published content, and laid the foundation on which this guide is built.

1. Your Mural Vision

As a mural project leader or artist, begin by asking yourself why this project is important. Your answer will guide your project and attract advocates with common goals. Often, artists create murals to add beauty to the environment. Others may want to commemorate an individual or inspire hope. A business may want a mural to attract attention by providing an Instagram-worthy backdrop for photos. Sometimes the site itself becomes the catalyst for creating a mural, such as when a drab building in a prominent spot begs to be something more.



Andreas von Chrzanowski (AKA Case Maclaim), **Miami Gardens**, 2015. Commissioned by Wynwood Walls. Photo courtesy of Goldman Properties.

Whatever your reason, write it down and talk about it to those who become involved. Let your goals and purpose guide your decision-making along the way.

While you identify your *why*, the next step is to find a pathway for your mural-creation opportunity; the *when, where, who, what, and how*.



Wynwood Walls
Miami, entrance
sign. Photo courtesy
of Goldman
Properties.

Funded mural opportunities are the most direct path to creating a mural. These opportunities can be private or public, and often involve a pre-selected site. For example, a private business may commission an artist to paint a mural on the public-facing wall of their store. Or, your city may have designated funding for a mural at a community center.

These opportunities present themselves in one of three ways:

1. Open Calls: In this process, the commissioning body releases an RFQ (Request for Qualifications). An RFQ is a document that defines eligibility requirements and describes the project. Eligible artists apply by submitting a portfolio, references, and other supporting documents. The selected artist (or artists) will then proceed with producing sketches or proposals.

ARTISTS - Apply for Open Calls Often: Applying for open calls puts your name and work in front of public art administrators. Even if you are not selected for a project, you may be kept in mind for commission or invitational projects to which your work is suited.

2. Limited (Invitational) Calls: In limited calls, a few select invited artists submit proposals for a project. These candidates are well-qualified and have proven artistic styles suited to the project. The commissioning body issues an RFP (Request for Proposals) and pays a sketch fee for each artist's work. From the produced options, the commissioning body selects a final artist.

3. Direct Selection (Commission): A commissioning body will sometimes identify a specific artist as the ideal match for a particular project. The selected artist is typically issued an RFP and receives a sketch fee for their work. Being selected does not guarantee a commission award; the commissioning body must still approve the artist's proposal.

ARTIST SELECTION: The commissioning body, whether public or private, will approve the final artist. Huntsville's public projects will follow the selection process outlined in Huntsville's Public Art Master Plan. Private funders will determine their own approval process.

Making Your Own Way

As a mural project leader, there are several considerations to keep in mind. If you are a selected artist, some of these factors will be addressed for you. However, independent mural project leaders will need to address them all. The following sections of this guide will explore these factors in detail.

2. Choosing a Wall

Both site partners and mural artists should assess walls for project suitability. If you are a selected artist for a City of Huntsville public art project, Arts Huntsville has already conducted this assessment for you. The same is true for private sites working in partnership with Arts Huntsville. Otherwise, artists and site partners should consider the following factors before selecting a wall:

- **Visibility** - The ideal mural is in an unobstructed and highly-trafficked location. For certain goals and themes, consider the audience that trafficks the area.
- **Wall Condition** - The selected wall must be structurally sound. If the wall requires structural repairs, these should be handled prior to the project.
- **Surface Properties** - Assess the wall for cracks, loose material, stains, or rusting. Note the surface material and/or determine the type of existing paint, if any. Pretreatment may be necessary; artist awards or project budgets should take the costs of any necessary prep work into account.

- **Elements & Exposure** - Moisture is the major area of concern for outdoor murals. Look for steam vents, take note of the roof, flashing, and drainage properties. Additionally, sun exposure can fade certain pigments faster than others. Take these items into account to determine prep, primer, color selection, and overcoats.

- **Safety & Security** - These considerations apply to both the mural painting process as well as well as public safety. If special equipment is necessary for safe mural installation, this adds cost to the artist. Murals should also be sited with public safety in mind. For example, murals inviting public interaction should only be installed on walls that can be safely approached on foot.



- **Permissions & Protections** - Consider site-applicable permissions and protections as outlined in the *Legal Stuff* section (page 24).



Eastside Murals,
**Galactic
Gardens**, 2017.
Commissioned by
Adventure Science
Center, Nashville,
TN. Photo courtesy
of Eastside Murals.

3. Selecting an Artist

This section is directed towards businesses, organizations, or institutions that have a selected site for their desired mural but do not have an artist. For these mural project leaders, you'll first want to refer back to the three major artist selection processes outlined in Section 1 of this guide. (*Your Mural Vision: Pages 5-6*)

Whatever avenue you choose for artist selection, Arts Huntsville can be contracted to offer assistance.

A NOTE ABOUT FUNDING: If you already have a funding source, you'll want to create a project budget before seeking an artist. (See Funding & Budgeting page 18). If funding is not yet sourced, consider the direct selection of an artist. The ability to include artist qualifications and portfolio items can strengthen your proposal.

Selecting a Local Artist

As a local arts organization, Arts Huntsville advocates supporting local artists. Arts Huntsville defines its 'local' service area as an area within a 35-mile radius of downtown Huntsville. For projects open to local artists only, a standard requirement is that artists either reside or operate an artist studio within this area.

If opting for a local artist through a Direct Selection or a Limited Call, the simplest approach is to reference Arts Huntsville's [Artist Directory](#). This directory is a free public resource that can link you to local artists and their work in a variety of disciplines and media. Mural Artists listed on the directory have been vetted by Arts Huntsville and designated as either 'Established' or 'Prospective' mural artists. Established mural artists have proven mural experience. Prospective mural artists either minimal mural experience or no mural experience, but demonstrated core artistic competencies to paint murals successfully. Mural project leaders can reach out to artists directly. Arts Huntsville recommends compensating an artist for any sketches or proposal work done.

Broadening Your Search

Whether or not a call is restricted to local artists, Arts Huntsville can assist with the selection process. Open or Limited Calls can be hosted on Arts Huntsville's Public Art Application Portal. This tool enables the collection of materials from artists such as portfolio items, artist résumés, and references. The tool also enables evaluation criteria and allows external logins for jurors to vote on or artists.

Arts Huntsville also offers consultation services for using other artist search options, as well as support for contracting your artist. Email publicart@artshuntsville.org more information and to discuss quote for these services.

Artist Selection Criteria

If opting to independently run an artist selection process, look for a mural artist who can demonstrate these key attributes:

- **Talent and skill with the medium** – Ideally artists should have specific experience painting murals, or at the very least in large painting formats.
- **Practical experience** – Past mural experience provides a basis for accurately estimating project pacing, costs, and challenges.
- **Portfolio** – A professional artist will have a way for you to review past examples of their work, either via a physical or virtual portfolio.
- **Ability to Collaborate** – The selected artist will interact with others throughout the planning, information gathering, design, and mural-making processes.



Jesse Andrews (AKA Honeyblood Art), **Avatars**, 2021. Commissioned by Downtown Huntsville & Lockheed Martin, Huntsville, AL. Photo courtesy of Arts Huntsville.

4. Managing the Project

Once a location is determined and an artist selected, the project manager will need to draft a timeline and budget. If the project is in the jurisdiction of Huntsville's Public Art Committee, the project will be managed by Arts Huntsville's Public Art Program Manager. More information about these public projects can be found in Huntsville's [Public Art Master Plan](#). Commissioning bodies operating outside this process will need to designate their own project manager.

The Basics

The amount of administrative work required for each mural project will vary. Identify the point person who will serve as the liaison with the artist and oversee the project management components. The main administrative responsibilities of this project manager include:

- Draft and manage the budget and timeline
- Run the artist competition (if needed)
- Secure contracts
- Confirm insurance coverage

- Arrange logistics for the mural installation (equipment, materials, water, and storage)

More complex projects may need someone to:

- Represent the project for any outside funding
- Organize promotion
- Consult with a conservator during mural planning,
- Work with a committee to direct the workload

Selecting Your Project Manager

The project manager is responsible for controlling the workload, tracking progress, setting reminders, filling out necessary paperwork, and ensuring that no details fall through the cracks. This person could do all the work, or they might direct the work of a team dedicated to supporting the project. A project manager might be:

- A business owner with a wall and interest in installing a mural
- The artist for the project, if qualified
- A staff member or volunteer of a local nonprofit organization
- An arts consultant or curator

Whoever inhabits this role should have qualities that lend themselves to the work. An excellent project manager is

organized, detail-oriented, communicates well, and seeks outside support when necessary.

Most timelines will extend to several weeks and months, especially if multiple permissions and permits are involved.

Project Timeline

Before setting a timeline or budget, it is important to make some key decisions. For example, running an open call will take longer and cost more than a direct selection. It is also important to allow time for the artist to develop the design, and to add more time to accommodate any planned community meetings or research. Finally, it is important to build in extra time for potential bad weather during mural installation.

It is also important to be prepared to adapt. As new information presents itself, the timeline or budget may need to be modified. For example, if the artist chooses a paint or finish with an extended curing time, this will need to be communicated to all relevant stakeholders. When it comes to project management, communication is key.

5. Budgeting & Funding

Mural projects require resources and funding, even if paint and supplies are donated. The cost of a mural project can vary depending on the size and complexity of the work, but it is typically between \$10,000 and \$40,000. Funding for mural projects can come from a variety of sources, including private donations, government grants, and corporate sponsorships. It is important to factor in the cost of mural maintenance and restoration when budgeting for a mural project.



Logan Tanner with mural drawing, 2018, Huntsville, AL. Photo courtesy of Lowe Mill ARTS & Entertainment

Estimating Expenses

When planning a mural project, you'll achieve the best results if your budget allows for an experienced

You'll achieve the best results if your budget allows for an experienced professional artist who will use high quality materials.

professional artist who will use high quality materials, so that the caliber of the final artwork meets or exceeds expectations and the mural will last as long as possible. If your budget is small, your mural should be too, in order for your project scope and budget to appeal to the best artists. To develop a budget, make several key decisions:

- Size and location of the site
- Complexity of the mural
- Life expectancy of the mural
- Selection process for the artist



In 2023, the typical cost of a mural project in the Huntsville

metropolitan area can range between \$20-\$50 per square foot, but can occasionally be higher or lower.

This estimate is inclusive of all costs. If the mural is expected to have a long life, good quality materials and maintenance will factor into the budget.

Morton Brown, a muralist, fine artist, arts administrator, and now also an arts consultant, advises that “if you do

Jesse Andrews (AKA Honeyblood Art), **Unlimited**, 2021. Commissioned by Downtown Huntsville & Lockheed Martin, Photo courtesy of Arts Huntsville.

not have an identified source of funding or a partner who will maintain the mural over time, do not consider your mural to be permanent. Define a lifespan that is appropriate for the budget and entity commissioning the mural” (Brown 2020, 14).

Measurement

Take detailed measurements of the wall early in the project development process. These measurements will ensure an accurate estimate of the mural’s cost, help you order the right scaffolding, and allow you to design the mural to scale. A chart that accurately measures the placement of windows, doors, and other features will be helpful for all of these purposes.

Budget Checklist

The following items should be a part of most budgets:

- Artist fee for design
- Artist fee for labor, which sometimes includes artist assistant fees
- Project administration costs

- Wall preparation, (cleaning, repair, priming, sanding)
- Supplies including primer, paint, brushes, rollers, drop cloths, protective coating, etc.
- Shipping
- Taxes
- Artist insurance
- Contingency for unforeseen expenses (add 5-10%)



Dariá Hammond, **Soar High**, 2021. Commissioned by City of Huntsville & Arts Huntsville, Huntsville, AL. Photo courtesy of Arts Huntsville.

Optional Expenses

Additional optional expenses may include

- Competition costs
- Tent rental for storage
- Scaffolding or lift rental, ladders
- Permit fees
- Street closure fees
- Community engagement costs
- Volunteer costs (include snacks and drinks)

- Signage, plaque, etc.
- Dedication reception Publicity and promotion, including media events
- Documentation for photographer and/or videographer, including any usage rights
- Consultation with a conservator
- Lighting
- Fundraising expenses
- Ongoing maintenance, including periodic inspection (quarterly or annually), cleaning, and eventual repair or relocation, if that is an option


Categorizing Your Budget

When planning a budget, define financial responsibility areas. For most projects, an artist award is defined as ‘inclusive of all costs’ with named exceptions. For example, it is common for a building owner to assume the cost of mural maintenance, or in some cases, lighting. Surface preparation may be handled by the commissioning body before the artist begins work. Or alternately, the artist may assume responsibility for this. All of this must ultimately be defined in the artist’s final contract.

Funding Your Project

While a local business may self-fund a mural on their property, a city, organization, or individual may seek out a variety of funding sources for a mural project. Some of these sources include:


- Self-funding
- Private patrons
- Civic or government grants
- Corporate sponsorship
- Foundation grants
- Individual giving campaigns
- Fundraising events
- In-kind donations (for supplies and services)

Detailed guidance for funding strategies is beyond the scope of this guide. Artists are advised to reference Arts Huntsville's [Proposal Writing Guide For Artists](#) . This free resource that will assist in proposal writing for RFPs and in assembling presentations of use while approaching other funders. Additionally, you will find funding resource recommendations in Chapter 8 of this guide.

6. The Legal Stuff

A number of regulations and guidelines require consideration before moving forward with a project.

Generally, this includes:

Permissions: Once your location has been decided, permission will need to be granted by the property owner to install the mural. For public sites in the Huntsville/Madison County region, reach out to publicart@artshuntsville.org  for guidance.

Signage Regulations: Another necessary step is to determine whether the planned mural content falls under signage regulations as defined by the municipality/jurisdiction where you are working. Ordinances change periodically, so you'll want to read and understand local signage regulations to ensure your mural content conforms to local zoning requirements. Local zoning ordinances are typically available online, and you'll want to reference




specific local requirements before installing a mural. General guidance includes avoiding logos or text. A limited block of information may be permitted adjacent to or within the mural, allowing for credits and acknowledgments. For more information or additional guidance, reach out to publicart@artshuntsville.org.

Brandon Donahue, Sam Dunson, Emily Miller, Herb Williams, and Chris Zidek, **Gibson Tribute Wall**, 2016. Nashville Walls Project & FirstBank, Nashville, TN. Photo courtesy of Brenda Stein Art, 2016 Nashville Bicycle Mural Art Tour

Permits & Other Requirements: Other requirements or permits might be required for mural installation. If, for example, you plan to use a lift to paint the mural and your project requires work in a public right-of-way (like a sidewalk or alley) a permit is necessary for a street closure. Check in with the local Zoning Department for the location

where you are installing your mural project for information on rules and/or restrictions for your particular location. Generally, by starting with your location address your Zoning Department, you will be directed to your next steps.

NRHP Considerations: Another consideration is whether your proposed wall is on, or eligible for, the [National Register of Historic Places](#) . The NRHP serves as our country's official list of historic buildings, districts, sites, structures, and objects worthy of preservation. If your wall is located on a site more than fifty years old, you will want to investigate its status. It is not illegal to install a mural on an NRHP site. However, the site's eligibility or inclusion on the NRHP may be damaged by the installation of a mural on historic surfaces. If you proceed, obtain permission by including this information in your site partner agreement. Additionally, an NRHP-eligible site may be ineligible for mural funding from certain sources such as from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Contracts, Insurance, & Agreements: When finalizing your project, you want to assure legal coverage through contracts and agreements. Typically, this involves securing:

- A contract between the artist and the commissioning body
- A site partner agreement between the artist and the owner of the property for private projects
- Certificates of insurance (COIs) from the artist as proof the artist has obtained the liability insurance to which they contractually agreed. This includes COIs for each “additional insured”; typically, the property owner and managing agency are included as insured parties in addition to the artist.



Dustin Timbrook, **Crayon Box**, 2019, Commissioned by Lowe Mill ARTS & Entertainment. Photo courtesy of Dustin Timbrook.

Artist contracts and site partner agreements include but are not limited to the artist's scope of services, building access, compensation, insurance, liability, and indemnification, copyright issues, and the artist's rights as they relate to VARA (the Visual Artist Rights Act of 1990).

Arts Huntsville provides a sample artist contract under [Public Artist Resources on the Arts Huntsville Website](#) [🔗](#), and mural projects managed by Arts Huntsville will use contracts similar to these.

These sample documents are not intended as a replacement for legal counsel. Artists and other involved parties are encouraged seek their own legal guidance.

7. Community Connections

Murals are creative works that can inspire when they express elements of humanity or everyday living that viewers can relate to. Like other artworks, they are intrinsically beneficial. Murals can be art for art's sake, but their significance is expanded when they are relevant to the community where they reside.

While not all murals need to reflect the community, mural programs around the country have achieved success through social engagement. Some cities consider giving the community a voice as the central purpose in mural creation.

Questions for Community Exploration

If you're an artist or business owner considering mural content, here are some questions to help you guide your approach to knowledge collection of the local community:

What is the history of the neighborhood? Are there any historical, cultural, or environmental landmarks?

Who lives in the neighborhood? What makes the people of this neighborhood or community different?

Are there any interesting facts about events or physical places in the community that can reflect or inspire?

How do people move around the space?

What are the public spaces, like parks, in the neighborhood that people share?

Who might contribute suitable and relevant ideas as you conceive of the design? Are there community members that can contribute ideas or offer feedback?

8. Additional Resources

This guide has only touched on the basics of mural making. There is much more to learn about this art form, and entire books have been written on the subject. This chapter will provide you with some additional resources that you may find helpful:



Logan Tanner, **Troll Mural**, 2019.
Commissioned by
Lowe Mill ARTS
& Entertainment.
Photo courtesy of
Lowe Mill ARTS &
Entertainment

On the Mural Painting Process: [How to Paint](#)

[Murals and Street Art 101](#) [↗](#) an excellent YouTube

playlist by mural artist and YouTuber *I am Detour*. These very thorough and clear videos cover everything from paint selection, scaling up images, tools, and wall prep.

On General Mural Production: [Mural](#)

[Production - A Resource Handbook, 2nd](#)

[Edition](#) [↗](#) by Mural Routes, Inc, is a thorough free resource with a robust list of contributors. It further details many of the topics covered in this guide.

On Applying for Artist Commissions: *The Artist's Guide to Public Art: How to Find and Win Commissions*, by Lynn Basa. A well-received book thoroughly covering topics related to the process of becoming a commission-winning public artist.

On Obtaining Funding: *The Artist's Guide to Grant Writing: How to Find Funds and Write Foolproof Proposals for the Visual, Literary, and Performing Artist*, by Gigi Rosenberg. A grant writing guide is geared towards creative professionals.

The Only Grant-Writing Book You'll Ever Need by Ellen Karsh more thoroughly covers grant-writing for nonprofit and community leaders.

On the Huntsville Public Art & Mural Scene:

[Arts Huntsville's Web Site](#) is kept updated with public art opportunities and other open calls managed by the organization. In addition, you'll find additional artist resources, sample contracts, Huntsville's Public Art Master plan, arts festival information, an artist directory, and more.



9. Media Launch

Eastside Murals,
Untitled, 2019.
Commissioned by
Kroger, Nashville,
TN. Photo: Erik
Doty

Once the work is complete, it's time to launch the artwork into the community! Formally acknowledge the gift that is being given to the neighborhood or city and add meaning by telling the story it is meant to tell.

Promotional Documentation

In order to promote the mural and project successfully, you'll need good documentation. With those tools, you can proceed to brainstorm, outline, and execute a plan that will link you and this work to as many people as possible.

WRITTEN NARRATIVE

Write a statement that tells a story about the mural. This narrative should include the goals, the design, the process, and what the completed mural represents. You and others can pull from this longer narrative for different needs and uses.

Information to include:

- Artist name and home city, state
- Mural title
- Short and long descriptions of the work
- Short description of community engagement efforts
- Location, location description, date, and credits
- Supporters and sponsors





Favio (Curiot) Martinez, **Untitled**, 2016. Nashville Walls Project & FirstBank, Nashville, TN. Photo courtesy of Brenda Stein Art, 2016 Nashville Bicycle Mural Art Tour

VISUAL MEDIA

Photos and videos not only document, but can illustrate the mural-making process and story. Consider in-progress photo and video documentation, a time lapse video, or interviews with the artist. If your budget allows, obtain professional images and/or videos as well.

Public Relations

Your written narrative and photos can be combined into a press release. You can utilize [Arts Huntsville's Press Release Service](#)  Even if your project is private and not managed by Arts Huntsville, community arts promotion and support is one of the organization's four core service areas, and will work to promote your mural launch to Huntsville-area media partners and on our social media channels. In addition, if you can contact publicart@artshuntsville.org  for marketing questions specifically related to murals. The Huntsville Public Art Program will accept your documented media for inclusion in our database for future



projects that enhance awareness of public art.

Merchandise

Determine if a market likely exists for related merchandise, for example, T-shirts, signed limited-edition posters, mugs, magnets, postcards, or stickers with the mural image.

Check with local retail venues looking for product that would be attractive to tourists as a

Roberto Salcido and Maximiliano Lizarraga Vidal, **Blue Fractals**, 2021, Huntsville, AL. Gift by artists to United States. Photo courtesy of Lowe Mill ARTS & Entertainment.

souvenir. The copyright holder would benefit from revenue generated from such a commercial usage of the mural image. Usage rights, which may involve royalties, need to be negotiated and agreed upon and included in the artist contract or can be negotiated in a separate agreement.

The most important part of a mural project, apart from the finished artwork, is its legacy. A mural project, well-done, will have a long life. By creating a plan for the mural's maintenance, developing a network of supporters, documenting the mural's history, and promoting the mural's message, the mural can maintain its impact for decades. It will resonate locally, regionally, and occasionally even on national and international platforms.

Market and promote your mural to the public so it will be seen, embraced, and appreciated by the largest audience possible and bring joy for many years to come. Make the work and launch it forward!

Logan Tanner, Dinosaur Mural, 2019. Commissioned by Lowe Mill ARTS & Entertainment. Photo courtesy of Lowe Mill ARTS & Entertainment.



10. About Huntsville's Murals

Murals are located throughout the city, with the highest concentration being in downtown area. Some of these murals are part of the City of Huntsville's Public Art Collection, while others are private commissions in public view.

Visitors to the downtown area can currently download a map of the [Purple Cup Secret Art Trail](#) for a basic guide to some of the murals and other publicly-visible art in the downtown area.

A citywide guide to the city's murals and other public art is currently under development. Please follow Arts Huntsville on social media to remain apprised of the latest!