



public art resource center

Beyond Accumulation? Planning for Public Art

by Joni M. Palmer



About the Americans for the Arts Public Art Resource Center

The Americans for the Arts Public Art Resource Center (PARC) was launched in June 2017 to serve the expanding field of public artists, administrators, advocates of public art, and field partners as they develop projects and programs in their communities. As an online portal, the Public Art Resource Center also allows individuals to find resources and tools that suit their work and interests.

As part of this project, Americans for the Arts is publishing a series of essays to explore ongoing and current trends that impact public art professionals, artists, field partners, and community members.

The essays in this series include topics like developing public art in rural, mid-sized, and urban communities; caring for public art collections in times of natural disaster, and the intersection of public art and arts education.

This essay series is just one resource available through the Americans for the Arts Public Resource Center. Visit AmericansForTheArts.org/PARC today to explore more.

About this Essay

Community interest in public art has continued to grow throughout the country. Urban areas and metropolitan regions are unique because public art programs have existed in these communities for decades. But what are some of the challenges and opportunities to having public art in large communities, and what does adapting to change look like? This essay explores the current understandings of what make planning and implement public art in urban areas.

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Wavelength by Emily White
at Lauderdale-Hollywood
International Airport, Terminal
1, New Concourse A,
commissioned by Broward
County Cultural Division.
Photo credit: Tabatha Mudra.

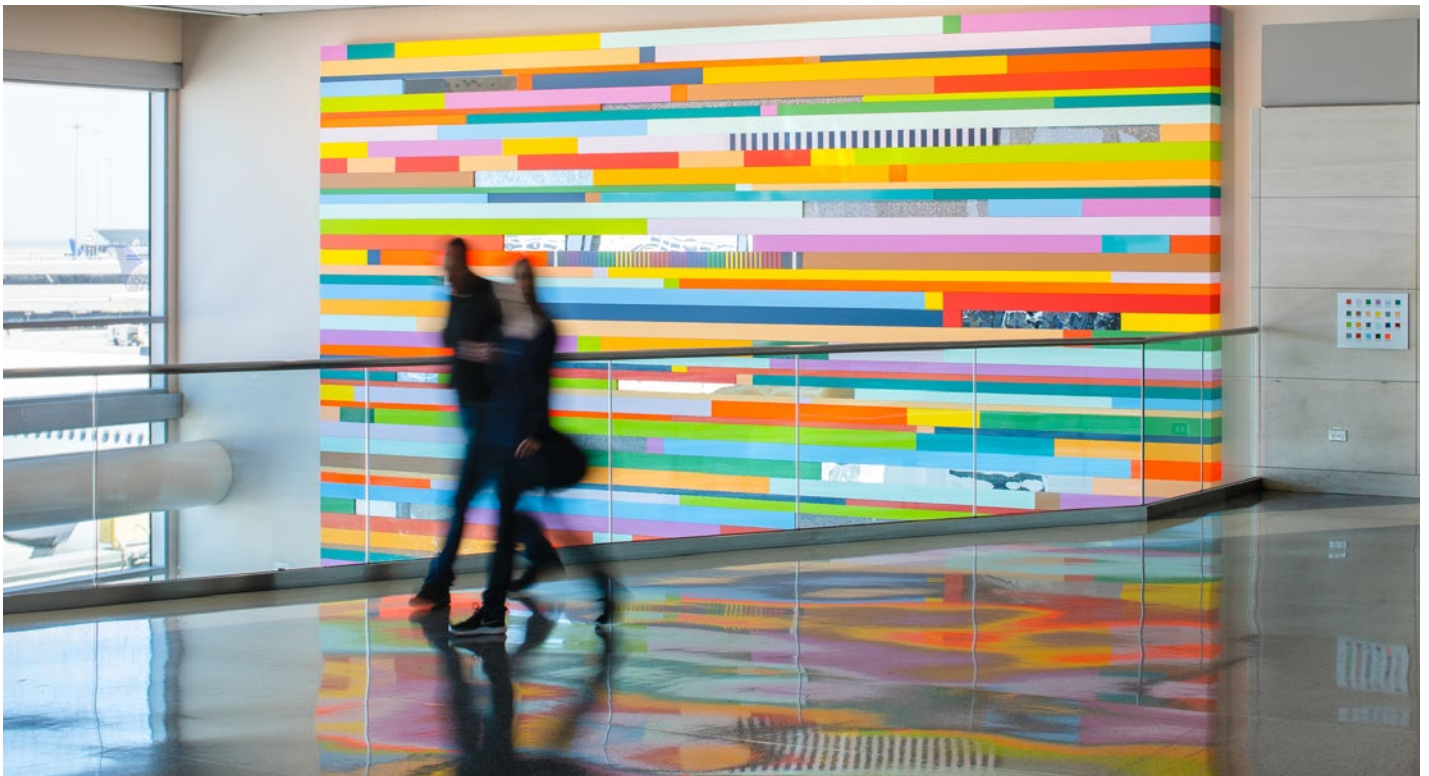
Introduction

There is a shortage of critical literature on the relationship between public art and planning. The intentions of this white paper are twofold: to provide information about how three programs plan for public art, and (very important to the future of public art across this country) to incite further study that explores the various ways programs (whether they be cities, counties, university campuses, or some other site or area) plan for public art. Much of the literature regarding public art and planning, as well as the discourse in the field of public art, focuses on urban revitalization and, more recently, creative placemaking. In the early 2000s there was a great deal of interest in public art master planning, primarily as an arena of practice and not of critical inquiry. Therefore, this paper attempts to address the gap in research literature and the lack of critical reflection in (and by) practice. The question that drives this white paper is: How does a public art program plan for public art?

Three programs were chosen—Broward County (FL), Minneapolis (MN), and San Francisco (CA)—for the following reasons: geographic distribution (South, Midwest, and Pacific Coast), sizes of public art collections, and because each program approaches public art planning in distinct ways.

Three Programs: Brief Overviews

The **Broward County Public Art & Design Program** (PAD), housed in the County Cultural Division, was founded in 1976. It encompasses 31 cities, plus unincorporated areas of the county, which means it is a complex working system of urban, suburban and rural areas. PAD is, according to Leslie Fordham, very much like a traditional percent-for-art program except that, because of growth across cities and unincorporated areas, it needs to find creative ways to work with various agencies and communities. Its collection includes approximately 260 works. Much of its work is functionally integrated rather than stand-



alone signature pieces, which suggests that the program is less of a collection of pieces than a program that approaches public art via systems (think cities, facilities, sites). As PAD moves into middle age, staff are thinking about how to shift its focus from a *sense of place* to something that better enhances and transforms municipal agencies and facilities in order to inform and inspire communities.

Everywhere A Color by Leah Rosenberg at San Francisco International Airport, International Terminal, commissioned by San Francisco Arts Commission. Photo credit: Ethan Kaplan.

The **City of Minneapolis Public Art Program** is located in the Long Range Planning division of Community Planning & Economic Development. Public art staff work daily with planners and urban designers, a unique position to be in since they become—through daily interactions and via the ordinance—an integral part of comprehensive planning, small area planning, and other such planning endeavors. Mary Altman, the public arts administrator, started the interview stating, “We are a modest program,” by which she meant it has a small collection (70 pieces) and considers itself a typical program that operates in a small city government. The program, more than 30 years old, has evolved into a resource for other agencies (county, regional council, transit authority) and has become a key player in long-range planning for the city. One of the questions Altman believes is important to strengthening the program is: how can public arts and artists be *influencers*. This is both a practical and philosophical question, and as such implores us to ask how public arts staff and artists can be integral actors and agents in city making!

San Francisco’s Public Art Program and Civic Art Collection operates under the auspices of the San Francisco Arts Commission. It is important to note that the Civic Art Collection (comprised of almost 4,000 pieces) was formed in 1932, while the Public Art Program was established in 1969; these two programs were merged in order to integrate operations, which allows for more holistic thinking about public and civic arts in the city. Before being able to characterize the program, Susan Pontius, director of Public Art and Civic Art Collection, emphatically stated that one must first understand that the public art program

operates within a complicated intersection of entities that is the City of San Francisco. In terms of the powers and visibility of the public art program—which Pontius said runs the gamut from A(irport) to Z(oo)—it is important to note that San Francisco is a charter city, which means the Arts Commission (by law) is not only integrated into the system, but has powers of approval, authority of civic design, and its own attorney to fight its key battles. The Arts Commission is a leader in working with emerging (public) artists, enabling them (through a mentoring program) to move from studio art to public art. The public art program operates under the assumption that public art has a job to do, both functionally and serving its communities and individual constituents.

Procedural Strategies

Susan Pontius makes clear that one must know *and* understand the context of a program, as well as the specifics of a program's ordinance and guidelines. It is worth considering how the naming of public art programs and where they are located within municipal bureaucracies affect their efficacy.

What's In a Name and Location?

The location of public art programs in municipal bureaucracies varies widely, though programs tend to *live* in one of five departments: cultural affairs, economic development, parks and recreation, public works, or planning. This placement can help or hinder planning for public art efforts. The name and location of a program does not necessarily impose insurmountable challenges and does not mean that the program will be constrained, nor does it mean that a location means that it will have free reign. These three program directors clearly emphasized how very important it is that program administrators manage—via both prosaic and creative means (e.g., negotiate, cajole, entice, etc.)—relationships with their host departments. And, equally important, they need to be aware of the possible internal and external partnerships that might be nurtured.

Even though public art programs are typically succinctly named (i.e., Public Art Program), that does not mean they are just about artwork and artists. It is often a challenge to help people understand that these programs do much more than place signature art pieces. So, even though names and locations of public art programs change over the years, what matters most is that the program is known—and understood—by the community and municipal staff. As Mary Altman noted, it is very useful that she is located in a planning department because she sees and works with her planner colleagues on a daily basis. Though sometimes she wishes she was in Public Works, she collaborates with it, and—as the only implementer (think: construction and maintenance) amongst planners she is able to bring this perspective to long-range planning.

Leslie Fordham made particular note of the fact that she works for a county—a major employer with 500 employees which oversees more than 1,000 square miles—seated in the City of Fort Lauderdale. People don't understand what and where Broward County is in relation to the multiple cities the program serves. For her, a move from Cultural Services to Construction Management isn't the issue. When she worked in Vail, Colorado, she learned about the importance of media and public relations and had a great relationship with the press (e.g., monthly features in local paper). She realized how important it was to work with people who were advocates for public art. And Fordham found that who is in a management role matters: Are they open-minded? Are they willing to talk about ideas?

Susan Pontius revels in the fact that San Francisco is a charter city, giving the Arts Commission powers of approval. This means that public art, by law, is an integral player in the city system (think: civic design review) and can thus act as an agent of change for the city. Additionally, the Arts Commission has engaged in projects that have further embedded the program in the minds and work of city staff as an important political, economic, and cultural aspect of the city. For example, the Arts Commission did a gross estimate of assets and found that the public art collection was valued at \$90 million dollars. This made people pay attention. As a result, a modification of the ordinance to set aside money for conservation made sense to people because caring for and protecting this multimillion dollar asset was smart city business.

What Does It Mean to Plan for Public Art?

Like all elements of urban planning, planning for and implementing successful public art is complex. In the early to mid-2000s, there was a great deal of interest in public art master plans. Because of recent critiques of master plans and unstable funding streams, combined with restrictive ordinances, it is worth exploring whether percent-for-art ordinances and protocols negate the possibility or feasibility of planning for public art in the short, medium, or long term.

How does one go about planning for public art? Public art programs struggle with being seen (and experienced) merely as a collection of individual objects. Such a collection is, clearly, a place to initially develop a program, but this group of administrators made clear that they are thinking about how they can best serve the community, whether through interactive and contemporary pieces, projects integrated into infrastructure improvements, or other types of community design programs. Stand-alone pieces are not a bad thing, per se, but the idea is to ensure the program is a living entity and is relevant to the community.

The fundamental elements of planning for public art, listed below, are not mutually exclusive; they are inextricably intertwined, which means one must examine priorities and consider the sequencing of actions.

- Create and maintain a clear and credible vision for the program's future.
- Articulate a clear mission statement that incorporates achievable goals.
- Develop a means to forecast potential opportunities.
- Pursue appropriate changes to policies and procedures.
- Include of experts, departmental representatives, and alternative voices when needed.
- Explore new funding mechanisms.

Conversations with these three public art administrators suggest that standard master planning is not necessarily the most useful means by which to plan for public art. One reason for this is because funding for percent-for-art programs is site-based; that is, money is to be used at the site that is generating the money. This makes it difficult to predict where projects may occur in the future. There are ways to deal with this uncertainty, and turn uncertainty into opportunities to cultivate conversations and make possible future projects (e.g., attending to the needs of underserved populations, and looking for opportunities for residential communities that do not have public facilities that generate funds).

Looking for opportunities for community engagement suggests (demands?) systems thinking. Public art must acknowledge that it is part of a larger set of municipal programs,

departments, and agencies, as well as political, economic, social, and cultural systems. This knowledge is both temporal and spatial. For example, knowing the history of the program (e.g., previous incarnations of the program and its relationship to other agencies) helps one to better understand and navigate the current workings of a program. Spatially, one needs to know not only where your partner programs are located but who and where your constituents are geographically located.

Projections: An Outlook and not a Master Plan

Successful public art program managers are aware of projects coming down the pike. They also look for how they might be part of other projects (bigger than and outside of individual installations), while developing a particular role with regard to the civic purpose of public art. Furthermore, they look for opportunities to pool money, seek out alternative forms of funding, and develop long-term conversations and partnerships. As such, public art managers, according to Susan Pontius, ask the following questions for every project: What is the project? Why do we want to do this project? Are we serving the public good?

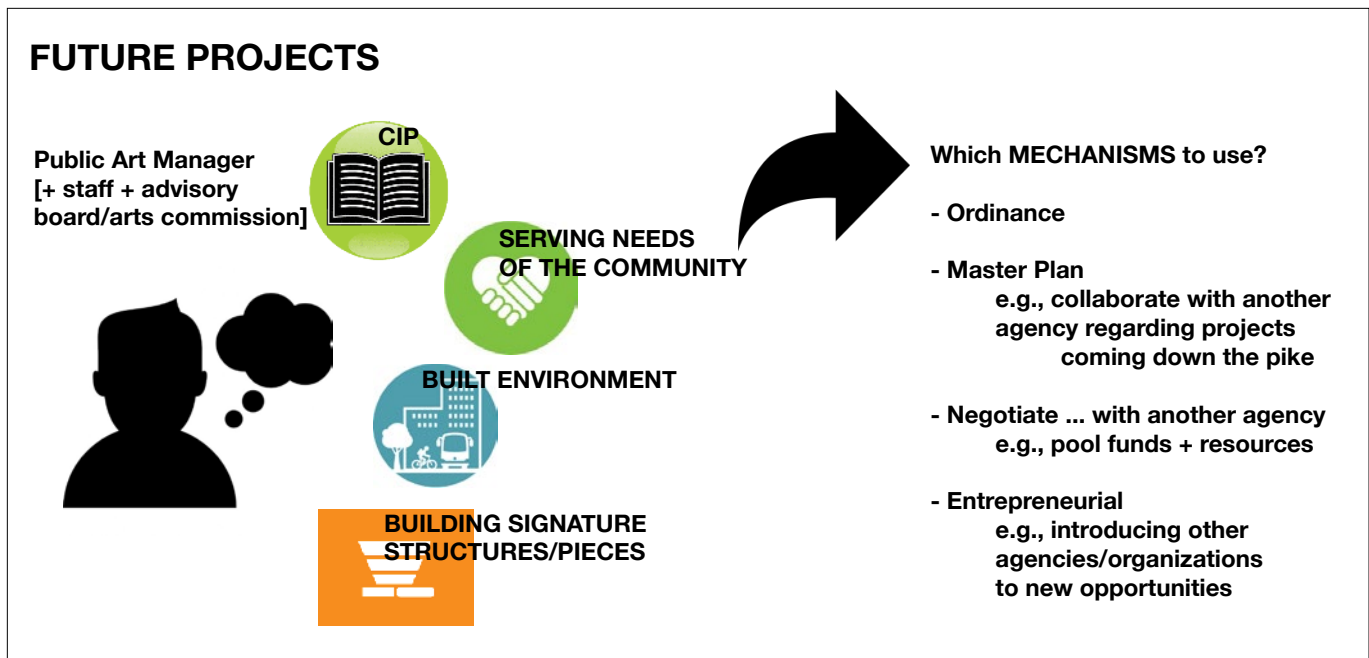
For example, instead of a master planning process, Minneapolis is using the *5-Year Outlook 2017-2021 Art in Public Places*. Mary Altman noted that calling this an *outlook* matters: it suggests something more open than a plan. The *5-Year Outlook* is a political document and a tool to help people picture what is intended to happen. How does the City of Minneapolis make these projections? Every year it engages in a constituent-based capital improvement plan (CIP) process that includes 30 to 40 long-range planning staff discussing infrastructure, facilities, parks, etc. Altman also has artists sit in on the process; they give her recommendations for interesting projects that she can then present to her board.

There are numerous common concerns amongst municipalities and similarly aged public art programs; for example, the public realm is increasingly being built and controlled by private developers, and existing funding streams are disappearing. As well, many public art programs are attempting to develop strategies to improve downtown appeal and to make connections to surrounding neighborhoods. Public art programs must identify site and project opportunities, as well as strategies for involving the community at-large and gaining support from multiple public and private partners. Developing a plan for every project—one that includes public art staff, commission or board members, and the community or client—is critical. However, one size does not fit all; it is useful to have a template for this type of planning, but the specifics of the project and the people involved will help when developing detailed plans that will ultimately be successful.

Approaches

Approaches to public art planning will vary depending on the age or level of establishment of the public art program. Planning for public art demands different skills (e.g., knowledge of art and of public processes), but is not any more complicated than other planning endeavors. One must, of course, understand the particular conditions within which one is working.

Planning for public art—short, medium, and long term, as well as microscale and macroscale—has, to a certain degree, been dominated by an ad hoc system. A thoughtful approach to planning for public art means ascertaining how various neighborhoods, districts, and zones might benefit from public art in a more coherent and long-term fashion. More importantly, the process can bring together community members, city staff, elected officials, business people,



civic stakeholders, and creative professionals to talk about how public art can be a more meaningful part of the community.

Figure 1: Future Projects and Mechanisms

Figure 1: *Future Projects and Mechanisms* represents the process Broward County follows when thinking about upcoming projects. Key to this diagram are three elements: actors, goals, and mechanisms. These three public art administrators make very clear that they are not necessarily looking for new tools and technologies, but rather mechanisms by which to achieve their program vision and goals.

Actors, Agents, and Relationships

“Integrating art with landscape, architecture, [and] infrastructure design of capital projects...means working closely with project managers and design team partners... Coordinating with [County] planning initiatives...means working cooperatively with various [County] departments, commissions, and residents to cultivate strong working partnerships. Public art staff should be involved in the CIP process, so that projects can be identified at the earliest stages.”

—*Public Art Public Places. A Public Art Master Plan for Arlington, Virginia* (adopted by the Arlington County Board in September 2000)

Implementing successful public art is complex and demands a delicate balance of actors and agents; there are a variety of people involved who have a range of roles and responsibilities, and who are a part of building and maintaining productive partnerships. The quote above, from Arlington’s public art master plan, is an ideal that many programs aspire to, but have not yet found the means (e.g., tools, mechanisms, and partnerships) to do so.

Who Should Be Involved?

The list of who should be involved is long and includes the usual suspects. We might start with municipal staff (e.g., public art program and staff from other departments and agencies), committees and boards (e.g., steering committees and advisory boards), elected officials, community members (e.g., neighborhood residents and property owners), special interest groups (e.g., artists, arts patrons, business owners, and developers), and opinion leaders and influencers (e.g., civic leaders, the media, and sports personalities).

The question is how to draw in people and engage them in the process of planning for public art in effective ways—in the short, medium, and long term.

All three program directors noted how important it is to value and nurture the relationships you have within and outside of your program. For example, think about your arts commission and board, as well as other municipal personnel (e.g., legal staff), as agents for change. That is, you must help these people think about how they can become involved. Asking doesn't necessarily mean things will happen.

Partnerships = People + Time

Respect goes both ways. Listening to fellow staff (internal and external to the public art program), partners, and constituents may seem easy, but doing it in a respectful way that helps nurture partnerships over time is essential to a strong and sustainable public art program. Though dynamics do change, institutional affiliations are important. Some public art administrators have been in their roles for significant periods and have seen changes large and small. Institutional memory can help a program contextualize itself, so that staff can learn from past lessons and also be prepared for change.

It is through institutional memory and respectful listening that productive partnerships can survive and thrive. In addition, staff must recognize that symbiotic partnerships are the goal, and that it takes time to figure out (and possibly convince people) how such relationships can be mutually beneficial.

Success + Advice = Future Research

Cities and counties in the US now have a new set of arts and cultural issues to contend with that are quite different from what was happening in the early 2000s. Indeed, we probably are facing a very different public arts landscape in the near future.

The three programs examined here are proud of the planning projects they have enacted in partnership with clients and other departments. The following project examples represent what each program considers successful and what each continues to aspire to, in terms of advancing their programs and enhancing their cooperative relationships with a variety of other actors in their communities.

Broward County: Transforming Public Facilities

The Public Art & Design Program is proud of Port Everglades, transformed through the integration of public art from merely a service facility to a welcoming space that people visit to better understand its function within the larger economy of the region. The images shown are of Dazzle, public art created by artist David Dahlquist and located in Fort Lauderdale (FL). (For more information about the Port Everglades Authority facility, visit porteverglades.net/.)



Minneapolis: Strengthening the Creative Ecosystem

Mary Altman shared two projects: the *West 29th Street Shared Use Street Project* and the *John Biggers Seed Project*. She and her staff feel these represent what is important to the present and future of public art. The goal is not only to implement public art pieces, but also to give artists the skills—developing viable work plans, learning computer and software skills (e.g., Adobe Suite, AutoCAD, GIS)—and the experience they need (e.g., providing emerging artists with project opportunities and mentoring) to be successful in the field right now. The City of Minneapolis Public Art Program works with artists—providing training, mentoring and coaching—to help them understand how they are a part of a complex creative ecosystem that is comprised of suppliers, fabricators, installers, as well as other artists. This program helps artists consider who might be their potential partners, and better understand what they will need to know (and do) in order to engage, negotiate and collaborate with a wide variety of professionals. (For more information about West 29th Street, visit minneapolismn.gov/dca/WCMSP-173461. For information about the Seed Project, visit minneapolismn.gov/dca.Seed.)

San Francisco: Continuity of Experience

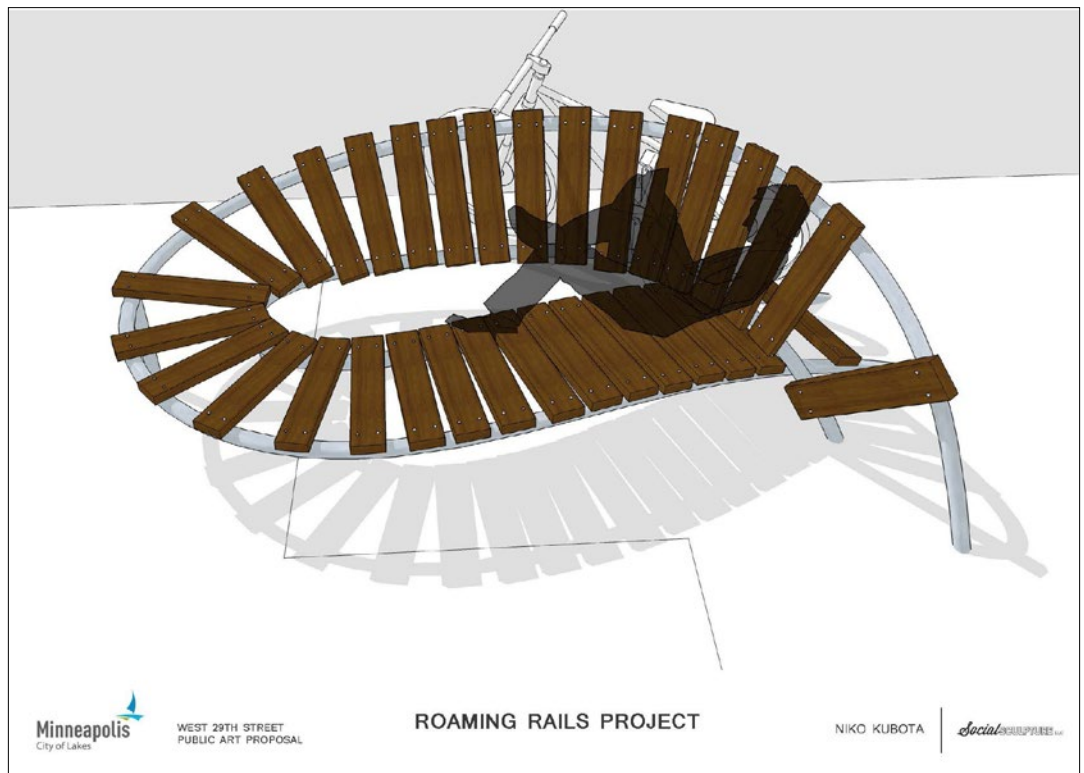
The Zuckerberg San Francisco General Hospital and Trauma Center (SFGH) is a large facility that incorporates a number of buildings and spaces, and services a wide range of persons (medical and research staff, administrators, academics and students, and patients and visitors). The public art at this facility exemplifies what the San Francisco Arts Commission works on as it advances the mission of its Public Art and Civic Art Program. Community identity and diversity were considered from the very beginning of the project, and were incorporated into the Request for Quotation (RFQ) by the Arts Commission. The Commission aims to create a continuous narrative through the experience of art; in this case, the pieces

LEFT: Port Everglades, Broward County: Entryway Project (composite image), July 2016. Photo courtesy of Broward County Cultural Division.

RIGHT: Port Everglades, Broward County: After. Photo courtesy of Broward County Cultural Division.

RIGHT: Niko Bench: A design from Niko Kubota for West 29th Street Shared Use Street Project. Photo by Long Range Planning: Public Arts Administration Program.

BELOW: Detail of a completed enamel panel for the John Biggers Seed Project. Photo by Long Range Planning: Public Arts Administration Program.



ABOVE: Detail of the railing design for the John Biggers Seed Project, created through the Mid-career and Emerging Artists Program. Photo by Long Range Planning: Public Arts Administration Program.

of the collection within SFGH are not unrelated. This approach is useful when trying to integrate the art, artist, architect, and architecture in a purposeful and unique manner. This approach also proves useful in terms of wayfinding, allowing people to construct various narratives (from one visit to the next), and reveals stories about the facility. (For more information about the hospital, visit sfgh.ucsf.edu and sfghf.org.)

Advice

Each of the program administrators were asked: If you were to advise another program about planning for public art (implicit to this question: what key lessons have you have learned?), what three pieces of advice would you give to other public art administrators? *All three public art administrators said that their advice would depend on the program and where it is located.* Seven themes emerged:



Be intentional. Always start with a strong foundation, which means you have to have a clear mission and guidelines for each project. What are you trying to accomplish?

Vary your funding. Look for and develop multiple and innovative funding mechanisms.

Be proactive about planning. Public art does happen in response to opportunities that present themselves, but program staff should be aware of what is being considered and what is being developed. Additionally, staff can and should create opportunities by reaching out to communities, sites, and artists.

Make friends. Make friends and develop strong partnerships with those in the private sector, nonprofits, and local and state government. You want your partners to be thinking about how to work with you.

Work towards success. To think that you are a stand-alone agency divorces you from other agencies and programs. It is important to know and to work your community—collaborating agencies (and the individuals within), community members, other jurisdictions, private sector, etc.

There is a wide range of types of artists who are involved in public art. The field includes more than the tried-and-true cadre of artists whose body of work focuses on public art and who have sophisticated skills and access to the most recent technologies. Also reach out to and mentor emerging artists (and continue to diversity the field). What does the next generation of artists look like? It probably does not look like previous generation because public art now can be so complex (fabrication, collaborations, types of projects). How do we ensure that artists entering the field have the right skills and the ability to produce viable deliverables in increasingly complex projects?

LEFT: Glass with polyester film interlayer by artist Stephen Galloway in the SFGH elevator lobby of the Redbud Redux Suite, 2015. Photo by Bruce Damonte.

RIGHT: Glass with polyester film interlayer by artist Stephen Galloway in the SFGH elevator lobby of the Redbud Redux Suite, 2015. Photo by Bruce Damonte.



The terrazzo floor design at SFGH in Nature of Medicine, by artist Rupert Garcia, 2015. Photo by Bruce Damonte.

Don't be afraid to find people (e.g., consultants) who can help you carry out the process and implement the work.

Develop advocates. Get people to be advocates, and help them figure out how, in their particular way, they can advocate for your program.

Have a media plan. Develop a productive relationship with the press so that you can get your message out to the community on a regular basis.

Future Research: What Questions Do We Need to Be Asking?

Beyond the advice given above, and possibly more important, are the conversations that need to happen amongst municipal staff, private design and planning practice, artists, community members, and academics. These three program administrators proffered a list of topics they believe need to be studied, and they [noted, they] need outside help to do it. The challenge is that most programs are one-person shops, so staff don't have the time and resources to do the research that would be useful. So, here are just a few questions to ponder.

How might we better educate, communicate, and share information?

It appears, though this is not surprising, that programs operate in something of a vacuum. This means programs need to develop methods—along with communication tools—that allow them to share lessons with their peers, and they need to venues through which they can robustly compare their work with other programs. For example, programs need to find a means by which they might enable multiple and various actors to remain both *in touch* and well-informed. Such communication might take the form of a blog or a section of the program's website dedicated to the public art planning process. Keeping people, particularly

the public, informed lets them know that the process will remain transparent. As far as municipal staff, consultants, and other actors, this communication will enable them to better understand the various phases in relation to one another's work, and will help them to more clearly understand their (potential) roles in the process.

With regard to sharing information, we might add communications and outreach lessons (e.g., successes and failures). Staff must dig deeper into understanding how they—and other programs—are achieving success, and they need to consider how they will continue to evolve the program. In order to develop, implement, maintain, and evaluate comprehensive and dynamic approaches to planning for public art, administrators need to know what is happening regionally, nationally, and globally. In order for programs to not feel isolated, we need to find ways to study—and communicate these studies with—programs around the world. How might this be accomplished? A few ideas include: YouTube videos of program directors talking about issues, challenges, and solutions (e.g., zoning and land use codes); creating a *TedXPublicArt* as a platform for presenting big ideas; and engaging local educational institutions by conducting research with students in high school and higher education programs. We need to think creatively and at multiple scales.

What are the most useful tools and mechanisms programs are using to successfully plan for public art?

One administrator said, “I do not need another spreadsheet!” High technology solutions are not necessarily the answer, and the tools don't need to be sexy. Instead, how do we encourage—and make possible—efficient and innovative employment of both high and low technologies throughout the planning process? Most programs, it seems, need quick and dirty tools to collect and evaluate data and then compare with other programs.

How do we nationally compare programs so that we know how we are doing?

Comparative studies need data and resources for data collection and analysis. How do programs do this with limited coffers, and when there is no national data about programs (e.g., cultural identity, diversity, or pilot programs)?

Final Thoughts

The research began with some initial ideas and preconceptions about public art program administrators' approaches. I am happy to say that I was thrilled by the conversations: while all three program administrators were sincere in their responses to my questions, what heartened me most was that their responses were philosophical and practical, passionate and direct, and knowledgeable and acknowledging of the fact that they have much to learn from their peers. Public art programs will, of course, face many new challenges as they plan for the future. What strikes me as critical to how programs will be able to not only survive, but evolve and thrive, is the notion that there is a wide range of people who are directly and indirectly involved in public art efforts across this country. Planning for public art involves many different individuals and agencies, and it takes patience, persistence, and the willingness to take risks. These risks are what have allowed programs to innovate. These risks, though, have not been imprudent; rather, they suggest how we must think about planning for public art in terms that address physical space, time, and relationships.

Americans for the Arts is the nation's leading nonprofit organization for advancing the arts in America. With more than 50 years of service, we are dedicated to representing and serving local communities and creating opportunities for every American to participate in and appreciate all forms of the arts.



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