

# Working with an artist

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## Sustrans Community Toolkit

You may want to work with an artist to help you translate your ideas of how you would like your street to feel and look into a piece of art. Find out if your local authority has an arts officer and if so, they may be able to help you with part of the process or some aspects of developing an art work. If they are not available you can carry out all the steps yourselves. It can be time consuming but it is very rewarding.

You'll need to write and advertise an artist's brief, short-list the applicants, interview them and make the final selection of an artist. Once the artist is in post, you may want to work with them to formulate some design options based on your community's ideas or aspirations and background research. After the artist has come up with some initial proposals discuss between you how they might work in your street and any alterations you might like.

### Writing an artist's brief

Once you've decided that you want to work with an artist you'll first need to discuss what it is you'd like them to do. The best way to do this is to hold a discussion session with your neighbours, limit the time and set yourselves clear goals to reach or questions to answer by the end. You could base your discussions on the points below:

- What is the purpose of the art work e.g. do you want a feature that helps to calm traffic or one that is decorative only?
- Do you want a specific type of feature e.g. a seat/sculpture/plaque/gateway, or do you want the artist to develop one for you?
- What should the art work represent e.g. a unifying piece, a memorial, an identifying piece?
- What adjectives would you like to be able to describe the final piece?
- How should it make those that view it/pass by/through it feel?
- Do you want to try and employ a local artist only?

You will need to try and write a brief that is not too vague nor too specific so you get applications from artists with relevant skills and experience as well as giving them room for creativity. You should, however include:

- A brief description of your project.
- Why you would like an art work and how it would fit in to the project/street.
- The role of the artist with an outline of the skills or experience the artist must have.
- An outline timeline of the project.

- The artists fees including details of what is expected for how much payment, bearing in mind that if the artist needs to travel from a distance you will need to offer higher expenses.
- A few lines on the management of the project i.e. who the artist will liaise with and who the other partners will be (e.g. council highways officers, housing association staff).
- Details of what they need to send you (their C.V, images of previous work, letter of application).
- Details of closing date for applications, how and who they should submit their application to, and when they'll hear back from you regarding the selection process.

### **Advertising your artist brief**

If your local authority has an arts officer they may help advertise your brief to their contacts. If not, look for information about local artist's groups or networks and ask them about the best way to get to brief to potential applicants. You can also contact the relevant Arts Councils of England, Wales and Northern Ireland web sites because they have facilities for advertising your brief on their web sites. Another good contact is an organisation called 'an' (Artists Newsletter). Contact their advertising section at [ads@a-n.co.uk](mailto:ads@a-n.co.uk) or 0207 655 0390.

### **Short listing applicants**

Once your deadline for applications has passed, decide whether or not you have enough to short-list (ideally a minimum of five). If you feel you don't have enough applications, you may want to consider re-submitting the ad and extending the deadline.

You will then need to short-list the applicants for interview and the easiest way to do this is to hold a resident's meeting where everyone can look at the images, read the supporting letters and CV's and vote for their three favourite artists. You can then work out the three to five artists with the most votes, who will be interviewed.

A couple of the most important things to look for when short-listing the artists are the quality, style and range of their work as well as the different approaches they have used in the past. It's also important for the artist to demonstrate that they have experience of working with community groups and coming up with a final design by taking everyone's views into account.

### **Interviewing**

Choose an interview date which at least three of you can make and give the chosen artists at least one week's notice. Inform them briefly on what they'll be expected to do (for example give a five-minute presentation on their previous work, answer questions etc).

Tips to conducting interviews:

- Make sure you have paper and make notes of the interviewees answers
- Agree who will be time keeper on the day so they can move the interviews along
- Decide as a group what the essential things are that you need to learn from the interviewee and prepare relevant questions – see below
- Plan a quiet, comfortable place to hold the interviews and arrange the seating in an informal relaxed manner
- Begin the interview by introducing everyone, explaining how the interview will be conducted and give a brief reminder of the post being offered
- Use open ended questions such as how, why, tell me and what questions
- Aim for the interviewee to be doing 90% of the talking
- Allow interviewees time to ask their own questions of you at the end
- Close the interview by thanking them for coming and let them know when you hope to have made a decision by and how you'll inform them

Some interview questions to give you some examples:

- Please tell us about any projects which you have undertaken which involved a similar community engagement approach.
- Have you had experience of running practical participatory workshops with adults/children?
- Have you had a chance to look round (your street) and what are your first thoughts or reactions?
- Has any of your work involved research into architectural or landscape heritage? If so, can you give us an/some example(s) of how you've incorporated the information you've found into your designs?
- It's very important to the residents that whatever is chosen as the final feature is durable/robust, weather resistant, does not invite graffiti and is easily cleaned. Indeed, one of the aims of this project is its longevity in terms of maintenance. Furthermore, if placed in the highway it may also need to be strong enough to withstand bumps from cars. What measures could you take to ensure the final piece fits this brief?
- What personal qualities do you think will be required of this post?
- What skills or qualities do you think you will bring to the post?
- This project is a partnership between (*insert your local authority*) and the residents of (*your street/community association*). There are likely to be others involved such as engineers, planners, tree officers etc. What experience do you have of working in a multi-agency team in this manner?

- If you were appointed, we would like you to start work and meet the rest of the residents as soon as possible, when are you available to start work on this project?

### **The artist's contract**

Once you have appointed an artist both parties will need to sign a contract – it can be a simple document so you will not need to involve a lawyer. Ask your local authority arts officer (if you have one) or the local / regional office of the Arts Council for a suitable example. Ask your contact as well about a fair rate of pay for your artist. The rate of pay may be affected by:

- The artist's experience
- The amount of travel needed
- How many days of their work you require

It is easiest for you if you state that you'd like them to be registered self-employed and therefore deal with their own tax, this saves you the hassle and time taken to sort this out.

For some guidance on artists fees see here: [https://www.a-n.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Guidance on fees and day rates for visual artists 2015.pdf](https://www.a-n.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Guidance_on_fees_and_day_rates_for_visual_artists_2015.pdf)

For some information on artist contracts see here: <http://www.artquest.org.uk/articles/view/commissioning-an-artist1>

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