



Public Art: Simple Practices for Applying to *Calls for Artists*

The premise for public art is that it must be original, one-of-a-kind, and site-specific. Preparing an application for a public art project can be a daunting task for those artists who have little or no experience in the field of public art – and in fact, for many who are experienced in the field. In an effort to assist/remind you of the importance of preparing quality applications, I've outlined some very simple practices to consider when reviewing and preparing an application in response to a *Call for Artists* (*Request for Qualifications* or *Request for Proposals*).

The *Request for Qualifications* (RFQ) format typically requires the applicant to provide a letter of interest, a résumé, images of representative work and a corresponding image list. Applicants are generally given 3 to 4 weeks to respond to an RFQ. Unless requested, the program administrator and review committee aren't expecting to read about or see a specific proposal so you should not prepare one. The selection committee may commission one artist for the project based on their application materials or they may select multiple finalists who would be invited to present their concept during an interview presentation. Finalists are usually given 5-7 weeks to prepare a proposal. Typically, the finalists are paid an honorarium for their concept and to help cover any travel expenses.

The *Request for Proposals* (RFP) format requires the applicant to provide all of the same materials as an RFQ as well as a conceptual proposal, project description, including material usage, placement and a preliminary budget. Create your concept visual to scale and be sure to provide the scale. The turn-around for an RFP is usually 6 or 7 weeks depending on the complexity of the project. As a general rule, artists are not compensated for their proposals when they are submitted in response to a RFP.

1. Call for Artists

Read the *Call for Artists* thoroughly so you understand the project and what application materials are expected. After reading the *Call* determine if:

- the project is something you actually have interest in
- you can envision a relationship for your work in the project
- the budget is adequate for a concept you might develop
- you can accomplish the project either individually or as part of a team
- the proposed timeline is feasible for your schedule

Follow the application guidelines, provide all of the information in the format requested and do not provide additional materials! Submit your materials on time and never ask for an extension; no matter what the circumstances. Keep in mind that many public art programs will not review incomplete and/or incorrect applications. When you have a question about the requirements or the format, contact the program administrator for clarification so you are able to prepare your application correctly. Generally, you will find that an administrator welcomes the opportunity and is very willing to answer your questions.

Whenever possible visit the site for which the *Call for Artists* is issued. For example, if the project is for a park, walk the site, ask a park visitor how they use the space and what they like about it. Is there a history with the park? Was the park named for someone or something? What is the environment like? Who are the residents that live in the surrounding area? If you cannot physically visit the site, you should at least do some research. Here are some points to consider when preparing your application materials and/or proposal:

- The project scope and goals as identified in the *Call for Artists*
- Method for research and how you envision developing an approach or proposal
- The audience for whom the work is intended

- Commission budget
- Possible locations for artwork placement
- Identify partnerships and/or ways to develop them
- Maintenance, technical and/or public safety issues
- Project timeline
- Visuals to articulate ideas and demonstrate practice

Keep in mind that through your application, you are essentially introducing (or reintroducing) yourself to the public art program and review committee. A public art program wants to commission and work with an artist who is creative and technically competent but also who understands and takes on the responsibilities associated with any public art project, including a professional, complete application. The administrator's responsibility (and joy!) is to help you through the process, be your advocate and spokesperson and to make sure that your artistic vision for the project is successfully realized.

2. Writing a Letter of Interest

Not all projects will or should be of interest to you. Many, for various reasons, may not be feasible even if you partner with someone on the project. However if the project is of interest to you and you believe it is feasible in scope, timeline and budget, consider these questions:

- Why or what about the project is of particular interest to you?
- Do you have a connection to the community, site or project?
- Have you done other projects of similar scope/scale?
- How might your work relate to and benefit the project?

Be sure to convey this information in your letter of interest.

3. Preparing a Draft Budget

If asked to submit a budget for the project you should generally include the following:

- artist/design fee
- fabrication cost
- installation cost
- shipping
- travel expense
- insurance
- engineering fees
- contingency

Even if you haven't been asked for a preliminary budget you should evaluate the above mentioned to ensure you have a complete understanding of what the project will cost. If selected for a project you will be required to provide an itemized budget before you can proceed. Keep in mind that your final budget might also include other expenses such as equipment or studio space rental.

4. Images of Representative Work

For most public art programs, viewing images of artists' representative work is a key component to a committee meeting. Typically, the committee views all of the artists' images first and scores the artists on the creativity, quality and technical ability of the work as depicted in the images. Based on the scoring, the committee creates a short list of artists to discuss further while referring to each artist's application materials. The committee might be viewing thousands of images during a meeting, so good clear photos are essential. Ensure that your images are high quality, straightforward and are just of the artwork itself. In other words, don't add text, backgrounds, pictures of your dog next to the artwork, etc. Keep the image of the artwork unless the work (for example an interactive piece) is more comprehensive with people/activity in the photo.

If necessary, hire a photographer to document your work in order to present a portfolio of strong images. Also, it is generally better to use a single image rather multiples of one artwork. Multiple images tend to add unnecessary clutter and can often be confusing. Typically, and this is very important, images must not exceed 1MB in size. In some instances additional requirements for image size, number of pixels, specific dpi, etc. are identified. Read and follow the guidelines for submitting your images. If you are not sure how to size your images, have someone help you.

5. Résumé

Maintain a current, brief, relevant résumé in a simple format without pictures, fancy fonts, colors, background graphics, etc. Edit accordingly.

6. Document Formatting

Please include your name, address, email and phone number on your letter of interest and at least your name on every additional document; the top is the best location so the committee can be reminded whose application they are reviewing every time they turn a page.

Unless otherwise specified, you should format your required documents for a standard 8 ½" x 11" page in a portrait orientation. Make sure you understand the requested format—is it a PDF document or a word document? As archaic as it may seem, many programs (ours included) still produce review books, copied in black and white, for their committee members to use during the review process. However, even if programs don't produce books, they would likely still want to provide the information digitally for the committee members and this formatting should still be applicable.

7. Review & Renew

Have a second set of eyes pass over all of your application materials before you send them out. Many times, you'll find things that can be corrected, edited or omitted to make the application better, more concise and more thorough.

8. Call for Entires (CaFÉ)

CaFÉ is the online system that many public art (and other) programs and organizations are using for their application processes. If you haven't done so, I encourage you to look into creating a free profile with CaFÉ. The CaFÉ system works with a nationwide network of public art programs, arts organizations, museums, galleries, etc. to host a wide variety of opportunities including public art commissions, artist residencies, art awards and competitions, juried exhibitions and roster and pre-qualified lists. For information visit https://www.callforentry.org/about_us.phtml.

9. Ask for Assistance

Again, if you are unsure about any aspects of the *Call for Artists* please contact the program administrator for clarification. If you are unsure how to format required materials, have someone help you; probably not the program administrator! Remember that while a request for some items or a required format might seem arbitrary, there is generally a logical reason. Following instructions on the *Call for Artists* is the first step to any application's success!

Please call or email me with questions or comments, Roni.Thomas@slcgov.com, 801-596-5000. I welcome the opportunity to talk with you or help you work through an application process.