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PUBLIC ART NETWORK ISSUE PAPER

METHODS OF ARTIST SELECTION

MARCH 2004

by Greg Esser
Director of Public Art, Phoenix Arts Commission
Phoenix, Arizona

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This paper seeks to establish recommended methods for the selection of artists for public art commissions. It provides an overview of selection methods for public art agencies and organizations to reference when establishing or revising artist selection procedures. Among the sources used to inform the model are an informal survey of programs nationwide, conducted by members of the Public Art Network's Services Committee, and the review of messages posted on the topic of artist selection on the Public Art Network listserv. The perspectives of both artists active in the field of public art and commissioning agencies are incorporated into the model. In conjunction with other planning tools and documents, including *Going Public* (Cruikshank and Korza: 1988), *New Works: A Public Art Project Planning Guide* (Fuller: 1988), and *Public Art By the Book*, (Seattle Office of Arts and Culture, to be published in 2005), the model will be particularly useful by offering commissioning agencies a range of options for developing relevant selection processes.

For a detailed description of the possible types and structures of artist calls and the recommended content, please consult the *Call to Artists Resource Guide*, which is available free on the Public Art Network section of the Americans for the Arts website at www.AmericansForTheArts.org/PAN.

Since the structure of commissioning agencies varies considerably, the recommended model for artist selection will not apply to every program and every project. When developing an artist selection process, program directors, public art consultants, and organizations planning public art projects must factor in local laws, constraints, and purchasing rules and regulations as applicable. As in all aspects of arts administration, the need to re-examine and question methodologies is an ongoing task. There are interpretations and adaptations to this model that will enhance it and bring it into greater functionality for particular programs and projects.

Americans for the Arts' Public Art Network and Research and Information Department released *Public Art Programs Fiscal Year 2001* in November 2003. The report is a detailed statistical overview of the budgets and programming of 133 public art programs during fiscal year 2001. It is based on the national Public Art Program Survey. Findings from the report are referenced throughout this issue paper.

Contents

1. A Review of Public Art Selection Methods
2. Comparing RFPs and RFQs
3. Copyright Protection
4. Composing an Artist Selection Panel
5. Conflict of Interest Policies for Selection Panels
6. Recommended Model for Artist Selection
7. Conclusion
8. Glossary of Terms

1. A REVIEW OF PUBLIC ART SELECTION METHODS

Before proceeding with the artist selection process, it is important for the commissioning agency to make decisions regarding the artists who will be eligible for the project. Restrictive parameters commonly include geographic location, media, recommended approach, and previous experience. The commissioning agency should develop parameters and review criteria based on the specific requirements of the project and agency policies and guidelines.

An ideal opportunity to obtain input from a community involved with a public art project is during the development of the call to artists. One strategy is to develop a public forum facilitated by public art program staff or others knowledgeable about public art. At the forum, members of the community can share their visions and values, their goals for the project and site, relevant history of the area, and other factors that artists might consider in responding to the commission. Public art programs that organize a number of public art commissions each year may wish to develop a forum to consider numerous projects at one time.

Determining Factors for Geographic Eligibility

Budget: One primary consideration for either limiting or expanding the geographic area for artist recruitment is budget. When the project budget is insufficient to accommodate travel and living per diems, the eligibility may be restricted.

Project Location and Context: Project managers may want to limit geographic eligibility for projects located in neighborhood settings or serving very specific constituents in order to facilitate more direct interaction between the artist and the constituents.

Project Prominence: Where the location is a significant public venue, geographic eligibility should be as broad as the budget allows.

Rationale for Recruitment of Artists beyond the Immediate Locale

Purpose of the Program: One primary purpose of many public art programs is to enhance the physical and cultural amenities of the city, county, or state in which the program is located. To do this, the program must be able to respond to the unique needs of each project—its architecture, site opportunities, constituent needs, and historical and social context. Therefore, the program looks for artists who have the experience and aesthetic vision to best serve the needs of the project and meet the highest aesthetic standards, regardless of where they live.

Cultural Tourism: Many cities, counties, and regions have, over the years, acquired large collections of artworks in the public realm. These form part of the cultural assets that attract visitors to the region, making a significant contribution to the local economy. A diverse range of artworks in the collection by artists of regional, national, and international stature is important to establish a noteworthy collection that will serve as a cultural destination.

Art Economics: A challenge common to many public art programs is the opinion or argument that the program should exclusively support local artists. It is a fallacy to think that such a policy would be beneficial to local artists. In the same way that artists seek exhibitions and gallery and museum representation of their work outside of their own community, so do they seek commissions nationally and even internationally. This is partly for economic reasons but, just as importantly, it is essential to expand and enhance their professional visibility and reputation. If a particular program adopted such protectionist policies, programs in other cities might react in kind, thereby barring local artists from getting the recognition they need and deserve outside of their own region.

Quality and Reputation: You are judged by the company you keep. It is in a public art program's best interest to develop a collection that is diverse in every respect, including style, media, subject, and approach. Many public art collections are judged by their overall quality and the inclusion of work by notable artists. In turn, artists are attracted to programs by their desire to have their work included in a collection of merit. In the same way, the richness of the collection is enhanced by the inclusion of the work of both local artists and those from other parts of the country.

Public Art Selection Methods

Commissioning agencies use a variety of methods to solicit submissions from artists for public art projects. They include:

A. Open Competition

In an open competition, a call to artists is broadly advertised and any artist is eligible to submit materials for consideration according to the guidelines established in the call. Eligibility and distribution may be local, regional, national, or international as appropriate. Selection panelists may also be asked to nominate or recommend potential applicant artists.

The call to artists may be structured either as a request for qualifications (RFQ) or a request for proposals (RFP). In an RFQ, artists are evaluated primarily on the basis of their qualifications as demonstrated in examples of past completed artwork and a resume. In an RFP, artists are evaluated based on their specific conceptual proposal for a project and on the basis of their past work and resume.

After the applications from the call have been reviewed, an artist may be selected directly by a selection panel to receive the commission or, more typically, three to five artists are short listed to develop and submit more detailed information for further consideration by the selection panel. In this case, the short-listed artists visit the project site and receive detailed information upon which to base a proposal. This may include a meeting with the client, community members, and the architect or landscape architect for the project.

Advantages: Open competitions, when coupled with a comprehensive outreach and marketing effort, are highly democratic. The widest pool of artists will respond to an open competition, many of whom may be newcomers to the public art field.

Disadvantages: Creating a legitimate open competition requires significant administrative effort. Handling correspondence, logging in recipients, preparing large quantities of materials for panel review, and responding to requests for information are typical tasks in all competitions. When dealing with the large volume of respondents typical to open competitions, staff resources can be significantly taxed. In addition to administering the mechanics of the competition, staff will need to develop and implement outreach strategies to insure the open competition is indeed well known. Finally, more established artists are frequently reluctant to apply to an open competition, preferring a more limited and curated process. Commissions requiring specific skills and/or aesthetic approaches may be better cultivated under more controlled circumstances than is typically possible in an open competition.

B. Limited Competition

In a limited competition, a list of artists is recommended by a selection panel and/or staff for application to a specific project. The list may be developed based on specific criteria for the project. For example, the parameters of a specific commission opportunity may be limited to artists with proficiency in a particular material or construction method such as glass, lighting design, or large-scale outdoor sculpture. Artists may also be prequalified by a selection panel or program staff on the basis of artistic excellence, reputation, or other curatorial factors and criteria such as previous experience with similar projects. A limited competition may seek either qualifications or proposals from artists. If proposals are requested, the number of artists is generally limited to three to five. A limited competition is most successful when the selection panel is well-represented by curators and other arts professionals capable of recommending qualified artists.

Advantages: The limited competition is appropriate where there are especially well-defined objectives that are likely suitable to a select pool of artists. Artists' response rate to an invitation is significantly higher than to open competitions. It is possible to specifically target artists for inclusion in limited competitions, thereby increasing the likelihood of a successful project outcome. There can be a good deal of administrative time spent in organizing limited competitions, particularly if they involves juries who nominate a large pool of artists. However, there is significantly less staff time spent on the overall limited competition process than the open competition.

Disadvantages: The limited competition uses a select pool of artists and is therefore not as broad as an open competition. Artists are dependent upon panel members and other nominators to put their names forward. Nominations are always dependent on the knowledge of a small group of panelists, which sometimes limits the quality and quantity of those nominated. Artists not nominated may feel excluded from the process and question the fairness of a public commission administered in an invitational rather than open process.

C. Direct Selection

Either hiring an artist or purchasing an existing work of art is recommended as a curatorial choice by a selection panel, program staff, or a public art consultant. A direct selection may be warranted when there is a single clear choice or sole source in terms of the artistic solution for a project. A direct selection may also be appropriate when there is a time constraint or an extremely limited project budget. A direct selection does not typically include public input and may therefore be subject to added scrutiny or require justification. An artist selected by direct selection typically enters into a contract with the commissioning agency to further develop a more specific proposal.

Advantages: Direct selection is the most efficient method of selecting an artist. It is a highly economical use of administrative resources. Artists selected directly are not likely to put themselves into competitions and thus usually represent a high level of professional achievement. Direct selection may also provide an opportunity to commission an artist new to public art who might otherwise be overlooked in an open or limited competition. The dialogue between client and artist can be particularly productive and frank without the apparatus of a competition and its cumbersome administrative constraints. Such dialogue can result in especially good relations and fruitful collaborations with all parties.

Disadvantages: The client commits to one artist early on and is not presented with alternative possibilities. Direct selection can rarely be used in public situations due to the open bidding requirements that govern most public programs. Artists not selected may feel excluded from a public process and may question both the wisdom and fairness of using direct selection.

D. Nominations:

Commissioning agencies may request that the members of a selection panel nominate specific artists to be considered for a public art commission opportunity. Nominations may be used as a form of limited competition or may be used in combination with any of the previously described methods of selection.

Slide Registry

Some commissioning agencies use a slide registry as a standing pool of artists from which finalists can be selected. A slide registry is a collection of readily available background material from a range of artists. Each artist is typically represented in the registry with slides of past work, a resume, and other support material. Slide registries may be either open to any artist who submits material or to artists who are selected by a jury review under the auspices of the commissioning agency. If artists are selected for inclusion in a slide registry by a selection panel, the selection of the artists should be according to established criteria.

Advantages: A slide registry is beneficial for a variety of reasons. It is a cost-effective and time-saving measure in that a separate open call does not have to be issued and distributed for each project. It ensures the availability of an eligible candidate pool. In addition, it is useful in situations where insufficient time exists to advertise a call to artists; if insufficient or inappropriate applications are received for a project; or when a program is commissioning a large number of projects at the same time. Selection panels can review candidates culled from the entire registry by staff who meet explicit criteria, such as media or residency requirements, or panels can review entire slide registries, though this approach is usually not necessary and very time consuming.

Disadvantages: Slide registries require a significant investment of administrative time to maintain the information on file and ensure that it is current. Artists who have not applied to a specific project may have no interest in the project for which they were selected from a slide registry. Registries are most effective for large programs with many ongoing commissions.

ARTIST SELECTION STATISTICS

Source: Public Art Programs Fiscal Year 2001, November 2003

Eighty-six percent of public art programs use an open call artist selection method

The majority of public art programs use direct mailings (88 percent) or website postings (86 percent) to advertise their artist opportunities. Only 57 percent of programs use newsletters. Forty-seven percent use all three methods. (Note: Could be a pie graph).

According to responding programs, the most common method used by artists to apply for a public art commission is an open call (86 percent). Of the open calls that are circulated, 72 percent of the programs issue requests for qualifications and 68 percent issue requests for proposals. Nearly one half report that artists apply for commissions by invitation or nomination (46 percent). Fewer public art programs report that artists typically apply by joining a slide registry (30 percent). Fifteen percent of programs use all three methods to commission artists. The least common method used by artists to apply for commissions is proposing projects directly to the program (15 percent).

2. COMPARING RFPs AND RFQs

The development and submission of a proposal may provide an advantage to an artist without significant previous public art experience. Programs that aim to enlarge the pool of experienced artists may wish to consider open proposals for some projects; most experienced artists will not submit proposals in response to an open call. There are other methods for providing this type of training and experience to artists without requiring the development of a proposal during the initial stage of selection for a commission opportunity. Free workshops may be scheduled to help artists understand both the artist selection process and the proposal development aspects of public art. Such sessions can provide pragmatic suggestions, examples of previously submitted proposals, and informal exchanges of information following formal presentations. Experienced public artists may be invited to share their advice, expertise, and insights with other artists and can address the process they went through to become successful in the field.

An agency may also consider sponsoring a competition targeted to newcomers to public art by requiring a detailed proposal based on a project site and offering an honorarium for a number of top proposals. The agency may help guide applicants by articulating specific proposal requirements to be addressed. Proposals may be exhibited but not commissioned, or may be executed as temporary projects.

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Source: Public Art Programs Fiscal Year 2001, November 2003

Fifty-eight of the nation's 350 public art programs report that they provide educational and/or training opportunities for artists. Programs that offer artist training are likely to offer open meetings (67 percent) and lecturers (56 percent). Fewer offer mentoring programs or provide resources for public art educators (20 percent and 19 percent, respectively). Nine programs report that they have a mentorship program for artists.

3. COPYRIGHT PROTECTION

In a selection process that uses an RFP structure to select artists, the commissioning agency may open itself to litigation under Federal copyright law in the event that elements of a nonselected artist's proposal are used by the commissioned artist. This possibility is more likely in situations where community panels or community groups review proposals in open public meetings and then provide input on what they found appealing from among all the proposals submitted. Once artists commit a concept to paper, copyright protection applies and submission of a proposal does not confer the right to use all or part of a submitted proposal that is not selected and compensated. This information should be communicated to the client and community in advance.

4. COMPOSING AN ARTIST SELECTION PANEL

Regardless of which method of selection is used, the composition of the selection panel is one of the most critical factors in the success of the artist selection process. Without a well-informed, educated, balanced, and diverse selection panel, the quality and results of the commission process are likely to suffer. It is important for a selection panel to reflect a high level of artistic and aesthetic experience and accomplishment as well as the history, views, and opinions of the project site, whether it be the users of a facility or residents living near a highly visible project site.

The balance of various viewpoints should be carefully considered when assembling a selection panel. The panel should include diverse members who are familiar with or have a stake in the project site, artists who are knowledgeable about public art, and others whose perspectives can add further dimension to the deliberations. It is recommended that art and design professionals represent a majority of the members of the selection panel. Above all, it is critical to ensure strong representation of arts professionals familiar with contemporary art and public art who have the ability to comment on the qualifications and appropriateness of the artists under consideration.

The findings of Public Art Programs Fiscal Year 2001 included the composition of public art programs nationwide. Typically, panels comprise architects/design professionals, artists and arts professionals not related to the project, commissioning agency representatives, community representatives, and public art program representatives. On average, artist selection panels include 8.6 people. Smaller selection panels comprising three to five members can be highly effective and are recommended. A drawback of larger panels is the difficulty in reaching consensus. There are a variety of voting methodologies to be considered as well.

Some programs use a discussion-based decision-making process to arrive at consensus. Other programs develop score sheets listing project-specific selection criteria, which are filled out and signed by each panel member and retained in the project manager's file for a period of time.

Public art programs will also want to consider the relationship and distinction between voting and nonvoting or advisory members. Advisors who bring technical expertise, such as engineers, risk managers, and technology specialists, along with those responsible for operations and additional community members can all contribute important perspectives for voting panels to consider. If there are nonvoting members, their responsibilities must be clearly articulated and communicated to them so that they understand their limited role in the process. The selection panel should be given an orientation prior to the presentation of artists' materials to allow them to better understand the project requirements, potential, and parameters, as well as the criteria upon which the selection should be based.

Program staff may or may not serve on the selection panel as a voting member. For most programs, staff serve as nonvoting facilitators for the selection process and provide input and guidance to the selection panel. According to the Public Art Programs Fiscal Year 2001 findings, 92 percent of the nation's public art programs use program staff to facilitate artist selection. Only 19 percent of public art program staff have a vote on artist selection panels.

Compensation of panel members varies by program. Serving on a selection panel requires an investment of time and professional input. Selection panel members should be compensated accordingly.

SELECTION PANEL COMPOSITION

Source: Public Art Programs Fiscal Year 2001, November 2003

Table 19: Community Representation on Artist Selection Panels and Table 20: Voting Members of Artist Selection Panels from the report.

Both illustrate the numbers and types of representatives on selection panels.

Community Representation on Artist Selection Panels			
Panel Participant Categories	All Public Art Programs	Government	Private Nonprofit
Architects / Design Professionals	1.1	1.1	0.8
Artists (not related to the project)	1.4	1.4	1.4
Arts Professionals (not related to the project)	1.1	1.1	1.4
Business Leaders	0.6	0.5	0.7
Commissioning Agency Representative	1.3	1.3	1.2
Community Representatives	1.6	1.6	1.5
Public Art Program Representatives	0.8	0.8	1.1
Other	0.7	0.7	1.0
Average Size of Artist Selection Panels:	8.6	8.5	8.9

Voting Members of Artist Selection Panels			
Panel Participant Categories	All Public Art Programs	Government	Private Nonprofit
Architects / Design Professionals	70%	71%	60%
Artists (not related to the project)	85%	86%	80%
Arts Professionals (not related to the project)	66%	65%	70%
Business Leaders	34%	37%	20%
Commissioning Agency Representative	74%	79%	50%
Community Representatives	71%	71%	70%
Public Art Program Representatives	19%	18%	30%
Other	26%	25%	30%
Average Size of Artist Selection Panels:	26%	25%	30%

5. CONFLICT OF INTEREST POLICIES FOR SELECTION PANELS

It is recommended that public art programs and organizations commissioning public art projects adopt a conflict of interest policy for voting and nonvoting artist selection panel members. According to the Black's Law Dictionary, seventh edition, conflict of interest is defined as "a real or seeming incompatibility between one's private interests and one's public or fiduciary duties."

Public art programs housed within local governments or nonprofit organizations can determine if a conflict of interest policy is already in place that can be used or adapted to fit the artist selection process.

Typical issues covered in conflict of interest policies used by public art programs include panel members who are in a position to achieve financial gain as a result of the commission, are related to artist candidates, or are in a business relationship with artist candidates.

6. RECOMMENDED MODEL FOR ARTIST SELECTION

A recommended model of selection for when a call to artists is used is outlined below. If a limited competition is selected, the model may be followed from step two. In addition, the model assumes that an artist selection panel has been composed using the considerations listed above.

This model is recommended because it is fair to artists in that they are not asked to spend time developing a public art proposal without compensation. This method also allows for short-listed artists to spend time developing relevant project proposals specific to the opportunity. It is also recommended because it provides a flexible approach to selection for commissioning agencies.

Step One: Developing and Advertising a Call to Artists

After meeting with the client, design team, and community to learn about the project and identify preliminary opportunities or approaches, a preliminary project scope and budget are established by the commissioning agency. Preliminary project criteria are defined in the call to artists (RFP or RFQ) that is advertised within a specific geographic area, nationally, regionally, or locally. The call to artists should be advertised whenever possible for at least eight weeks to allow artists sufficient time to respond. Agencies may publicize projects through direct mailing, nominations from selection panel members, local and national publications, websites, and listserves. (For a directory of free opportunity listing services, see the Public Art Network website at AmericansForTheArts.org/PAN.)

The recommended structure for a call to artists is an RFQ combined with nominations from individual panel members. This is recommended because it does not require artists to complete significant creative work without compensation. As mentioned previously however, in some instances where the objective is to solicit new artists, preliminary narrative proposals may be desirable.

Step Two: Artist Short List Selected

The selection panel reviews all of the eligible submitted applications. Applications that do not comply with the requirements of the RFQ can be removed from the selection pool by staff. Panels should be informed of all submissions, including those that have been removed due to failure to conform to explicit requirements.

After the review, which may take more than one meeting, the selection panel recommends a short list of three to five finalists for further consideration on the basis of past work and qualifications. It is recommended that agencies check references for all short-listed candidates. When references are checked, a standard list of questions should be developed and used for all finalists. The RFQ should have already identified whether finalists shall be asked to develop a site-specific proposal for a fee that will be evaluated by the selection panel or whether the final selection shall be made upon the basis of an interview between the artist and the selection panel. The panelists may also consider what specific issues or points they wish the finalists to address, whether in proposal or interview format. A list of questions should be developed to pose to each of the finalists.

Step Three: Development of Proposals

Comparison of Interviews vs. Proposals for Short-listed Artists

Proposals

Advantages: A proposal produces the most security for client, commission, and community in that it provides a “What you see is what you get” approach. There are no surprises and the buy-in of client, community, and commission may be fostered as the artist’s proposal is presented for review. This method may be desirable in situations where the specific site for the artwork is predetermined; when there is a time constraint and the artist must proceed to fabrication immediately; and when the agency is working with communities or clients skeptical of-or resistant or new to public art.

Disadvantages: Generally, a preliminary design is developed by a number of artists for a modest honorarium. This approach does not allow for substantial interaction between the artist and the community, client, and project designer because there are multiple artists involved and it is impractical to work with each finalist in this manner. Once the artist develops and submits a proposal, it may be difficult to allow for further input from community, client, and architect. In the end, the agency might not be getting the best or brightest idea that the artist is capable of developing, or the most responsive proposal to the conditions of the project site.

Interviews

Advantages: One artist is selected based upon an interview and is compensated for the time and effort in working with the client, community, and project designers to develop an in-depth, educated, and well-informed proposal. An interview may be the best method in projects where collaboration with architects and community is one of the desired objectives. Interviews are also recommended when artists’ work will be integrated into a facility not yet fully designed, or when a complex proposal for a large project is required.

Disadvantages: The unpredictable nature of public art prohibits a guarantee of an appropriate proposal when one artist is exclusively responsible for its design. An artist is selected without the panel knowing exactly what will be proposed. Many artists who work in the public art arena have a portfolio of projects that varies greatly from project to project. A leap of faith is sometimes required in these situations. A portion of the project budget will be spent on design and several months may pass before a proposal is accepted.

If the short-listed artists are invited to develop more detailed proposals as the next step of the selection process, the commissioning agency should establish a detailed description of what will be required of the artists at the proposal stage. Prior to developing proposals, finalists may be issued a memorandum of understanding that details the proposal requirements and sets forth deadlines, fees to be paid, and a sample of the standard contract that is to be entered into between the artist and the agency. This will allow artists the opportunity to determine whether there are any potential issues to anticipate, such as compliance with the Visual Artists Rights Act of 1990, copyright ownership, or the payment schedule. Proposals typically include 1) images and/or models of the proposed artwork, 2) a detailed budget that demonstrates that the proposed artwork can be implemented within the available project budget, 3) a description of the project and the artist's working method, and 4) a time line for project completion. Proposal requirements should be standardized by the agency to ensure fairness in the decision-making process. It should be clearly articulated if a model is required or if a design board is sufficient. Finalists should be informed of special circumstances that might impact their budgets, including insurance requirements, use of union labor, or other factors. After receiving this information and input, finalists should be given at least eight weeks to develop more detailed proposals.

Finalists should always be compensated to develop proposals. The commissioning agency determines the proposal and travel fee for the short-listed artists. These fees should be determined in advance and identified in the call to artists. The fees paid should be commensurate with the actual travel costs and time involved in the development of a detailed proposal, and should not be considered a partial honorarium. These fees should be competitive with the compensation provided by other commissioning agencies nationally. Artists must not be asked to work without being fairly compensated.

PROPOSAL FEES

Source: Public Art Programs Fiscal Year 2001, November 2003

The vast majority of public art programs report that they pay artists for their proposals when they are finalists for a project (83 percent).

Government programs are slightly more likely to pay for proposals than are private nonprofit programs (85 percent vs. 75 percent, respectively).

The commissioning agency provides the finalists with as much detailed information as is feasible about the project site, including any relevant contacts within the community. It is recommended that the commissioning agency organize an orientation meeting for the short-listed artists at the project site. This provides an opportunity for the artists to meet with the community, the client, and the project design team and to experience the site first hand. Artists should be informed about any additional resources that may enhance their knowledge about the project site. Conducting a group meeting ensures that all short-listed artists receive the same information.

If an on-site project orientation is not possible because of financial or time constraints, the commissioning agency must provide the finalists with detailed information including, but not limited to, architectural drawings, renderings, description of the proposed program for the facility, community demographics, photographs of the site and the surrounding areas, and other relevant information that will help in the development of a considered proposal. However, it cannot be too strongly emphasized that finalists will be best able to develop meaningful proposals if they have physical access to the site.

ARTISTS' RIGHTS

Source: Public Art Programs Fiscal Year 2001, November 2003

Most public art programs report that their artist contract complies with the Visual Artist Rights Act (88 percent). Similarly, 90 percent of public art programs say that the artists they commission retain the copyright of their work. When the copyright is not maintained by the artists, most often it becomes the property of the public art program. A few programs report that they share a joint copyright with the artists.

General communication between the applicant artists and finalists and the members of the selection panel should be facilitated by the staff of the commissioning agency or the consultant to avoid the appearance of inappropriate lobbying on the part of the applicant artists. Staff can also determine whether any particular questions raised by one finalist should be shared with all the other finalists.

Step Four: Artist Interviews

The finalists present their proposals in person to the selection panel. The panel meets all of the finalists on the same day. This approach gives the panel the opportunity to learn more about the artist's concept as well as to obtain more information about the artist's personality and working approach. The artist's personality and working style may be important factors, particularly in projects where an artist will be required to work collaboratively with other members of a design team and/or to work closely with diverse community members. Conversations with finalists are also good opportunities to gauge the degree and quality of their creative thinking. Following the interviews, the selection panel makes a recommendation of one artist for the commission. The recommendation is then submitted to other bodies, if required, for final approval prior to awarding a contract.

Artist Interview Goals and Objectives

Goals:

The goal of the artist interview during the artist selection process is to give the panel an opportunity to better evaluate the match between the artist's aesthetics, skills, experience, and personal qualities and the needs of the project.

Objectives:

- Evaluate the artistic quality of the artist's work and its appropriateness to the site
- Evaluate the match between the artist's skills, background, and experience and the project scope of work and other project requirements
- Provide greater insight into how the artist would approach the project
- Evaluate how the artist's personal qualities, interest in the project, etc., might affect the artist's performance on the project.

Format:

Interviews are usually about 45 minutes long. The interviews are usually structured to allow the artist to present his or her past work, allow the panelists to ask a series of prepared questions, and finally allow the artist to ask the panel/project manager questions about the project.

1. The artist presents his or her work to the panel.
Although the panel has already seen some of the artist's slides, having the artist present his or her own work provides the panel with an opportunity to see more examples of the artist's work, thereby allowing them to further evaluate the aesthetic quality and appropriateness of the work to the project. The presentation also allows the panel an opportunity to gain greater insight into the artist's artistic vision and approach to artmaking.
2. The panel asks the artist a series of predetermined questions designed to amplify the artist's relevant past experience. Questions should be based on the necessary qualifications and scope of work published in the RFQ. The artist's response to questions relating to his or her experience relative to specific requirements of the project helps the panel evaluate whether the artist has the necessary experience or background to successfully complete a commission. Questions might include asking the artist to describe his or her experience working with community groups, working with other design professionals, and working with budgets and time lines.
3. The artist has an opportunity to ask the panel questions about the project. This is another opportunity for the parties to evaluate the fit between the artist and the project.

If artists are being selected for design work, they may be interviewed without being requested to develop a specific proposal.

Artists should be notified as soon as possible, following necessary approvals, by the commissioning agency via telephone and then in writing about the outcome of the panel. If desired, agencies may offer and artists may request constructive feedback about their proposals and presentations.

Step Five: Design Contract

After the final selection and approval of the artist and/or proposal, the artist and agency typically enter into a contract for design refinement for the proposal. It is recommended that the commissioning agency allow for changes to occur in an artist's proposal following final approval, based on changes at the project site, direction from the client, further consideration and insights, or other factors such as safety and liability. It is also recommended that maintenance issues be addressed at the proposal stage to determine whether significant maintenance or operating costs will be required to ensure the long-term viability of the proposed work. This is particularly relevant if technology, water, plant materials, or new and untested materials are proposed.

7. CONCLUSION

Unlike the design of city infrastructure, where function and public safety are primary design criteria, public art infuses new and innovative practices into the design of shared public space. Public art is about taking risk-when most successful, the elements developed by artists are without precedent. Public art may catalyze change in communities, provide the unexpected, and provoke debate.

This paper is intended to be used only as a recommended model. Selection processes for public art should be responsive and flexible enough to work with the unique parameters of specific commission opportunities. The preferred model for a selection process is an RFQ. While such decisions may be informed by community input and technical constraints, the selection of artists in any process should be made by those with the most appropriate qualifications to evaluate artists.

Artists are the bottom of the food chain for public art programs. Without artists, public art programs would not exist. Artists are often asked to work without compensation and to donate their work to support charitable causes, despite the fact that artists, particularly in the early stages of their careers, are often in the lowest income range. The field of public art represents one of the largest and newest professional avenues for artists. At this point in the development of the field it is critical to affirm the economic value of the sole source creative work of artists by asserting that artists should not be required to develop proposals or undertake other creative work without fair compensation.

The costs of a selection process can be considerable, and may be difficult to justify for projects with very limited funding, particularly if the costs of selection are deducted from the available budget for a project. Costs for travel and proposal fees should be considered when planning a commission opportunity.

Every commission opportunity is unique, and every agency will be constrained by specific local requirements. This model is intended to serve as a general guide and to raise issues for consideration during the planning of a commissioning process. Agencies can apply the model to their individual circumstances and adapt as necessary to maintain relevance and conformance with existing policies, traditions, and guidelines.

8. GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Artist: An individual professionally engaged in the production of creative and original artwork.

Call to Artists: Announcement of a specific commission opportunity and definition of the application requirements and selection process. A call to artists may be either an RFP or an RFQ.

Finalist: An artist who has been selected from a larger pool of applicants to proceed to a higher degree of review.

Prequalified: Artists are elected according to a curatorial decision or selection criteria by a selection panel or program staff. Criteria and decisions may be subjective, objective, or a combination of both. Examples of criteria that may be established include previous experience with public art, number of completed projects, specific budget ranges, experience with specific materials, or artistic reputation and appropriateness to the parameters of a specific project.

Program staff: Refers generically to the administrative staff of a commissioning agency or a professional consultant hired to implement a project or program.

RFP- (Request for Proposals): A request for submissions for a specific opportunity that requires development of a proposal. The RFP defines the specific requirements for the proposal, including the project budget, criteria and constraints, description of the project site, and format for submission of the proposal.

RFQ- (Request for Qualifications): A request for submissions for a commission opportunity that requests support material documenting the past experience of applicants.

PUBLIC ART NETWORK'S SERVICES

PAN Listserv: This networking tool connects colleagues and acts as a research engine, newsletter, and a stage for critical dialogue, and is available exclusively to Americans for the Arts members.

Public Art Conference: The annual public art preconference of the Americans for the Arts convention brings together professionals from the diverse field of public art for two days of presentations, information-sharing, networking, and tours of public art. Visit the events section of the website for details on this year's conference.

Website: Visit www.AmericansForTheArts.org/PAN to learn about public art resources, artist opportunities, websites, publications, and events nationwide. In addition, find images of public art, summaries of the public art conference sessions, and a public art bibliography.

Public Art Program Directory: This essential resource is the most comprehensive directory of public art programs in the U.S. It is a great tool for artists and administrators who want to learn about programs and opportunities nationwide. To order, visit the bookstore at www.AmericansForTheArts.org or call 800.321.4510.

Year-In-Review Slide Sets: Are you looking for images of public art projects? Developed by PAN as an extension of the annual Year-In-Review conference session, these slide sets highlight innovative and exciting samples of American public art. Preview images and order a set online at www.AmericansForTheArts.org or call 800.321.4510.

Networking and Outreach: Need help with a question or want to spread the word about a current project? PAN provides opportunities for colleagues to network, research, and learn. In addition, the PAN Facilitator is available via e-mail at pan@artsusa.org to help answer questions and guide you to available resources.