

HOW DO I... ORGANIZE A COMMUNITY MURAL?

Murals are a form of public art and help provide a “sense of place.” Especially if local artists and young people are involved, murals reflect the unique character of the neighborhoods and cities they beautify. They can communicate the pride and cultural values of a community. Depending on the size of the mural, you may need a considerable number of volunteers to help. This guide explains the basics of planning, coordination and materials involved in implementing a community mural.

WHAT YOU NEED

Make a list of all materials specific to your project. Some considerations are mural size, surface, painting technique and budget. Below are commonly used items. Other items may be necessary depending on the particular condition of the surface you paint.

DROP CLOTHS

ACRYLIC PAINT

PAINT SPRAYING SYSTEM

BUCKETS

BRUSHES IN MANY SIZES

STIRRING STICKS

MIXING PALETTES OR TRAYS

METAL SCRAPERS

(To clean dried paint off palettes)

WIRE BRUSHES

MASKING TAPE

YARDSTICKS

BROOMS AND SHOVELS

EYE PROTECTION / GOGGLES

LADDERS / SCAFFOLDING

MILK CRATES OR OTHER STURDY STORAGE BOXES

ACRYLIC VARNISH FOR FINAL COAT

(Matte or semi-gloss; may be spray paint or brush)

BENEFITS



GETTING STARTED

- 1 ENGAGE THE COMMUNITY.** First, always get permission for a mural from the owner of the surface/wall/space and any property you access. It's best to get community feedback before paint hits the wall. This better connects the message to the place, avoids conflict, and builds support for the project.

2 CREATE THE DESIGN. The mural design can be simple or complex, graphic or illustrative, abstract or realistic. Some murals depict a local leader or historic event, while others tell stories or dreams. It's a good idea to partner with a volunteer with art experience like a graphic designer, design student or artist. Find ways to connect with local artists and students! The proposal needs buy-in from community members—after a few mockup designs are made, get their feedback. It also needs to be thought out and simple enough for volunteers to implement.

MURAL SURFACE	Step 1: Clean it!	Step 2: Prime it!
Bare Wood	None	Knots and pitch streaks should be sanded and spot-primed. Apply primer coat (formulated for latex).
Previously Painted Wood	Remove any loose material, power wash clean. Sand surface.	Inspect knots for staining, sand spot prime as needed. Apply primer coat (formulated for latex).
Bare Masonry	None	Apply masonry conditioner. Apply water-based latex primer.
Previously Painted Masonry	Remove any loose material, power wash clean. Sand surface.	Apply masonry conditioner. Apply water-based latex primer.
Bare Metal	Remove any grease, dirt, solvent. Sand surface.	Apply alkyd or latex-based primer.
Previously Painted Metal	Remove any loose material, rust, grease, dirt. Sand surface	Apply alkyd or latex-based primer.

If you come across old paint that could have lead, you ca

3 MAKE A BUDGET. Seek out local grant and sponsorship support to help fund your mural.

4 PAINT THE MURAL. The chart below explains how to paint on a variety of surfaces.

5 UNVEIL TO THE WORLD. Host a dedication and invite the press, elected officials, donors and mural participants. Ask the mayor or a public official to make a public statement in support of the mural. Give credit to those who helped—volunteers, donors and partner organization(s). Make the event a festive atmosphere, helping to begin the process of making the mural a local landmark.

Step 3: Paint it!

- Apply any underpainting or drawing.
- Apply final Acrylic paints to surface.

What is underpainting?

A great way to begin the design is to pre-draw or paint the mural. You can paint the areas with acrylic paints thinned by a matte medium or draw the mural on the brick. This will help your volunteers be oriented on where to paint the design.

What should I use to thin my paint?

Use an acrylic matte or gloss medium to thin your paint. Water is more likely to trickle down the wall and damage what you have already painted, though it can work.

Why use acrylic?

Acrylic based paints are both the most affordable and most resistant to weathering. Oil ages and adheres badly.

Step 4: Varnish it!

- Apply clear, non-removable coating to protect.
- Let dry thoroughly (at least 48 hours).
- Apply a varnish. The best varnishes are acrylic based.

Why varnish it?

Varnishing protects the mural from pollution and moisture. It also can help protect the mural from possible graffiti damage.

What varnish?

Speciality mural varnish and wax sprays are the ideal varnish, however an acrylic based varnish is a good substitute. Typically matte, satin or semi-gloss is suggested.

Urethane varnishes work but can yellow over time and cause damage. It is also difficult to repair after graffiti damage.

TIPS & FAQs

- ✓ **Always think safety.** Check with your insurance company about scaffolding liability and coverage. Orient eligible participants to scaffolding safety and encourage them to wear eye protection.
- ✓ **How do I avoid spills?** Assume paint will spill—then you'll be prepared! Protect ground around your mural with overlapping drop cloths, plywood or paper coverings.
- ✓ **How much paint?** One gallon of paint or primer typically covers about 100-300 square feet. Check product details. Textured walls absorb more paint, and complex designs and techniques can require multiple layers of paint.
- ✓ **Protecting against vandalism.** If your budget allows, products like Soluvar can help protect your art. If the mural is coated in Soluvar, you can mix mineral spirits with a rag and wipe off the vandalised areas. Reapply the Soluvar when complete.
- ✓ **What about primer?** The mural surface must be clean of dirt and old paint before primer is added. Coat thoroughly. Once priming is done, you can begin painting!
- ✓ **What type of final varnish?** Matte or semi-gloss acrylic varnish can be sprayed, brushed or rolled onto the mural. (Spraying is quickest; rolling is most likely to cause damage.) Always test a small section of the mural first to avoid damage.

RESOURCES

For more detail, see **Bernard Williams' wonderfully thorough, "Techniques of Community Murals."**

(Chicago Public Art Group) www.cpag.net/guide

On the left, click "Community Murals," then "Techniques of Community Murals."

"Painting Exterior Murals" covers important technical considerations. (Golden Artist Colors Inc)

www.goldenpaints.com/technicalinfo_murals

Contact local arts groups and learn from experts:

www.promotionandarts.org/arts-council/baltimore-mural-program (Baltimore City)

www.mygatewayarts.org (Prince George's County)

www.muralarts.org (Philadelphia's renowned murals)