

Public Art and Placemaking Guide for Artists

In this guide, public realm means outdoor or shared spaces that the public can see or use, such as streets, sidewalks, parks, public buildings and transit spaces. Public art projects need to be safe, durable and suitable for the public realm. Artwork may need to withstand weather, regular public contact and potential vandalism.

This guide explains how to apply for a public art or placemaking opportunity. It also outlines what to expect if you are selected for a commission.

If you have questions not addressed in this guide, contact us at art@durham.ca or by calling 3-1-1.

1. What is temporary public art?

Temporary public art is artwork that stays in place for a limited time, up to ten years. It is not insured, and the Region will not make major repairs if it is damaged. Temporary public art can appear on walls, underpasses, traffic signal boxes and other public spaces. Durham Region is primarily focused on temporary public art projects that support emerging artists.

2. What is typically included in a Call to Artists?

A Call to Artists describes a public art opportunity and invites artists to apply for a design contest. Calls will be posted on the [Public Art and Creative Placemaking Hub](#). They usually include details about the site, project background, local community, budget or artist fee, selection and installation schedule, technical requirements, selection process and submission requirements.

You may see artists' calls that are one-stage or two-stage design contests.

In a one-stage contest, artists receive the project details and submit a proposal or rendering, a description of the work, and their biography or CV. Only the selected artist or artists receive an artist fee. Depending on the project, artists may need to work with Regional graphic design staff to adjust the artwork so it fits the project site or surface.

In a two-stage contest, artists first submit examples of recent work, a statement about their proposed design idea, links to their online portfolio or social media account, and a summary of their qualifications. This stage gives artists a chance to explain why the site or project matters to them and to show the Selection Committee their practice and experience. Photos of past artwork are an important part of the application. Artists do not submit a full proposal at this stage. The Selection Committee will invite a set number of artists to move to the second stage.

The second stage will involve submitting a proposal to be reviewed by the Selection Committee. All artists who submit a proposal will be provided a fee as advertised in the Call for Artists. The selected artwork will be awarded the commission and artist fee.

3. How does the Region set artist fees?

Durham Region sets artist fees in a way that recognizes artists' time, skill and professional expertise. The Region uses the [CARFAC Public Art Toolkit](#) and the [Public Art Minimum Recommended Fee Schedule](#) as guidance when planning public art opportunities.

Artist fees will be identified in the Call to Artists. The fee may vary depending on the overall project budget, duration, scope of work, site requirements and the stage of the design contest.

4. How are artists chosen?

Whether you are emerging or established in your career as an artist, Durham Region is excited to offer opportunities to showcase your work in the public realm. Our process for commissioning and acquiring public art is based on the principles of openness, equity and fairness. Public art will be acquired following the Region's [Purchasing By-law](#).

An Art Selection Committee reviews proposals and recommends selections to the Region. These committees operate at arm's length, which means they provide independent advice based on the proposal, the site and the selection criteria. Selection committees help keep the process transparent, fair and professional. Durham Region is committed to appointing Selection Committees that reflect the diversity of the region's population.

If you are interested in participating in an art selection process, please review our [Guide for Participating in a Selection Committee](#).

5. Award of commission and agreements

After the Selection Committee reviews the final proposals and recommends an artist, the Region completes a technical review. Regional staff, and other design or engineering professionals if needed, review the proposal to make sure it works for the site and meets feasibility, maintenance, logistical and technical requirements.

If the recommended proposal raises any concerns, the artist will be contacted for more details. If the issues cannot be resolved, the Selection Committee may be asked to recommend an alternative artist.

The selected artist will be offered the commission and asked to sign a contract. The contract will explain the project requirements, licensing terms, expectations and payment schedule. Please review the contract carefully. If any language is unclear, you may wish to speak with a lawyer before signing.

6. Integrating community perspectives and placekeeping

Public art projects are most successful when the uses of the public space are understood and taken into account. This may mean consulting directly with community

members, researching the history of the site or imagining a new future. In most cases, it is a little bit of all of the above. Artists are strongly advised to understand and respect the site and the people who use it to create artwork that not only reflects and explores the cultural, historical or natural attributes of a site but also challenges people to see and interact with their community in new ways.

Placekeeping is an approach to design based on land stewardship that is centred around recognizing the rights of the landscape as a living being first and considering our responsibilities now and into the future. It involves thinking about the context and history of the place including Indigenous histories and futures and preserving and maintaining the unique qualities and character of a place over time. It involves ongoing efforts to protect, sustain, and nurture the identity, heritage, and cultural significance of a particular area. Placekeeping can include activities such as advocating for the preservation of historic landmarks, promoting local traditions and customs, ensuring equitable access to public spaces, and safeguarding the natural environment. It recognizes the importance of continuity and long-term stewardship in sustaining thriving and meaningful places. All Durham Region-led public art projects need to consider and integrate placekeeping.

7. Materials and Fabrication

When considering materials for use in public artwork, it is very important to be aware of factors which will contribute to wear and tear. Consider the effect that things like temperature fluctuation, condensation, and human interaction will have on the piece. Artists should know that pieces should be functional and durable in the range of -40°C to +40°C.



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Information in this guide has been gratefully adapted with permission from the [Winnipeg Arts Council's Public Art Guide for Artists](#).