



Temporary Public Art – A funder’s perspective

Speaker Notes: Brett Roler, Downtown Memphis Commission

I. WHAT IS THE DMC?

a. Who are we and what do we do?

- DMC not funded by tax \$; self-help for commercial property owners
- We are not an arts organization.

b. Our Goals: Two Metrics for Downtown

- More people Downtown + increased commercial property values

c. Why do we use public art?

- Public art is a tool for community redevelopment; Necessary building block of complete neighborhoods, not icing on cake
- Low-cost way to temporarily improve blighted buildings
- Signals to people that someone cares about a place

II. ADVICE FROM A FUNDER’S PROSPECTIVE

a. Read the RFP or Call to Artists.

- What is the funder looking for in a public art proposal?

b. Put yourself in their shoes as an organization.

- What is the organization trying to do?
- What problem are they trying to solve?
- How will they define a successful project?

c. Think of art as a commodity or product.

- The funder is purchasing the artwork in an effort to accomplish something.
- What is motivating the funder to put resources into public art?
- Figure out what that is before you start designing the art.

d. Budgets are usually non-negotiable.

- Understand that the funder has a budgeting process and probably had to make trade-offs or defer other expenditures.
- If the agency is not primarily dedicated to public art, the funder is already taking a risk.

III. SUBMITTING A PUBLIC ART PROPOSAL: WHAT NOT TO DO

a. Don’t submit a proposal late.

- Your proposal may not get full consideration.
- I can’t take the risk that you will not meet deadlines.

b. Don’t ignore the budget.

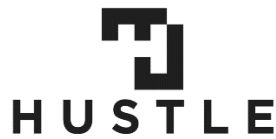
- Don’t complain about the budget; Accept it as a fact.

c. Don’t guess – it’s OK to ask questions.

- Reach out to the project contact if you have questions.

d. Don’t over promise.

- If you propose something, make sure you can pull it off.



- If you are proposing something that is at the limits of your technical ability, make that clear in the proposal and outline the backup plan.

e. Don't skimp on the visuals.

- **Images of you proposal and images of previous work are the most important part of your submittal.**

- Photorealistic renderings of the proposed artwork are key.

- This will help the selection committee or arts administrator understand how the work fits into the site and will look once complete.

IV. SUBMITTING A PUBLIC ART PROPOSAL: THINGS TO REMEMBER

a. Don't apply for everything blindly. Ask yourself if your work is a good match for the project.

b. Visit the site.

- Most funders want a project that has some relationship to its site or context.

- "Plop art" is usually a bad idea.

c. Treat the process like a job application.

d. Follow the directions in the RFP.

- If they asked for it, assume they need to know it.

e. Proof read your proposal.

- I need to have confidence in you as a professional who will take the job seriously.

f. Have a non-artist friend read through your proposal.

- Your artist statement has to make sense to other people, not just you.

g. Anticipate the standard questions from funders (maintenance, durability, graffiti, safety concerns and structural/engineering issues, etc)

- Having answers ready = look professional, competent, & prepared.

h. Have a defensible budget.

- Be able to explain how you put together the budget and any estimates

- Consider adding a 5-10% contingency as a buffer.

V. FINAL THOUGHTS

a. Think of this as a customer service relationship.

- The funder is your customer.

- Be professional, accurate, and prompt.

b. Make sure your timeline is realistic.

- Missing deadlines will make it very difficult to hire you again.

c. It's OK to be proactive.

- For the DMC, you don't have to wait until you see a RFQ.

- You can be proactive about suggesting ideas for temporary public art. We might say no, but don't be afraid to propose something.

d. If you are not having success with RFP's, it's ok to ask for feedback.

- Most funders can give you constructive feedback.

- Just make sure you want to hear it before you ask.