

Graffiti Prevention: Creating a Community Mural

Use a paint-brush mural to help keep graffiti off a wall that is chronically hit or has a long history of vandalism. Murals are rarely defaced by graffiti and instill a sense of pride among those who live nearby.

In Albuquerque, NM, Keep Albuquerque Beautiful, the city's Keep America Beautiful, Inc. affiliate, has helped citizens create over 30 murals. Graffitied walls have been transformed into scenes of American and frontier history, landscapes, and ethnic pride.

From conception to completion, a mural may take up to six months and involve many people. Many cities document through pictures and journals the mural process, displaying photos at the dedication ceremony.

To create a community paint-brush mural, use these guidelines based on Keep Albuquerque Beautiful's checklist:

1. Secure partners

- Estimate the amount of supplies needed and costs. Costs are likely to be anywhere from \$5,000 - \$25,000. Expenses will depend on the size of the wall, the need for scaffolding, and any artist's fees.
- Seek funding from non-profit and city agencies, highway departments, neighborhood associations, and businesses.
- Contact a local paint company or hardware store to request a paint donation.
- Consider including law enforcement as a partner, especially any anti-graffiti unit.
- Use the media to get out information on the proposed mural project to help round up financial and in-kind support.

2. Identify a site

- A wall or other area frequently hit with graffiti is a good choice for a mural. Also consider the neighborhood, property owner, and visibility.
- Obtain written permission from the property owner to create a mural. If the site is on public property, permission may require the approval of city officials or a county board. Check in to this.

3. Create a design

- Contact the local arts council or arts guild to get a list of mural artists. Or, ask a high-school art teacher or local artist to be the lead designer. The artist should be familiar with mural graphing and wall preparation. Some artists will work voluntarily, but in most cases a fee is appreciated.
- Get design ideas from neighborhood and civic groups, community leaders, and mural partners. A design that works well in one area may not be appropriate for another.
- Develop a scale drawing, in color, to share with the mural partners, including funders. Involve everyone in the final design selection. Once the design is approved, set up a timeline with major markers toward completion.

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- The property owner should also approve the design and sign a “mural protection policy” agreeing to take care of the mural over a set period of time.

4. Recruit volunteers

- Recruit schools, arts organizations, neighborhood groups, and others to gather volunteers to help paint the mural. Artistic ability is not required. Interview volunteers and ask them to sign a volunteer waiver form, or show proof of insurance.
- Urge the lead designer to involve youth and local arts students in the mural development process. This is an opportunity for them to learn graphing and mural techniques. Students are usually available only after school or on Saturdays.

5. Gather supplies

- Needed supplies include water, man-made shade, insurance waiver, surface preparation materials (caulk, primer, and/or stucco patch), brushes, rollers, trays, paint, pigment tints, chalkline, rags, drinking water, sodas, snacks, buckets, mixing sticks, and sunscreen.
- A long mural six feet or less in height eliminates the need to borrow or rent ladders and scaffolding, which can be expensive. If the mural is larger, scaffolding is likely needed; take safety precautions.

6. Prepare the site

- Remove weeds and litter from the base of the wall and surrounding area.
- Remove excess or old dried up paint from the surface that may be cracking or peeling off. To do this may require power washing, scraping or sanding.
- Seal cracks in the wall with caulk and make needed repairs.
- Prime the wall.
- Transfer the image to the wall.

7. Complete the mural

- Take appropriate safety and supervision measures during painting.
- In hot summer months, paint early in the day.
- Apply an anti-graffiti coating on completed mural.
- Cleanup around the site. This will help to show off the mural.

8. Unveil to the community

- Have a dedication. Invite the press, elected officials, and everyone who participated. Serve food, have music, and create a festive atmosphere.
- Ask the mayor to make a public statement in support of the mural.
- Ask police, especially any anti-graffiti unit, to block off the streets and participate in the ceremony.
- Give credit to all involved in creation of the mural—from those making donations to volunteers.