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CultureWork

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Processes, Resources, Collaboration: Considerations for Greening Public Art Programs

[**Betsy Bostwick**](#)

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Introduction

Two years ago, while finishing my Master's Research Project "Going Green with Public Art: Considering Environmental Standards in Public Art Policies", I began my position as Public Art Manager for the Clackamas County Arts Alliance. The Clackamas County Arts Alliance (CCAA), originally formed as a citizen advisory board for the Board of County Commissioners (BCC) in 1994, is a service organization (now housed in the Department of Tourism and Cultural Affairs) dedicated to creating access to the arts and culture in Clackamas County.

In 2007, the BCC approved a Three-Year Art Master Plan, which called for commissioning public art in parks, plazas, and other public spaces countywide. That is where I come in; a result of the Plan was the creation of a Public Art Manager position to facilitate plan adoption according to the County's Public Art Policies and Guidelines and national "Best Practices" in public art. An added goal of this position was to work towards a public art program that addresses Clackamas County's commitment to sustainability.

My position with CCAA is a marriage of my passion for public art and ambitions for doing my small part in creating a sustainable future. Since beginning my

position with the Arts Alliance, I have been privileged to infuse some of the concepts presented in my Master's Research (<http://hdl.handle.net/1794/6576>) and in my article on the Community Arts Network Reading Room (http://www.communityarts.net/readingroom/archivefiles/2008/12/going_green_wit.php) into the administrative and artistic processes of the public art program.

Greening Guide

By merging my final Master's Research document with information collected from sources, interviews, and case studies, I developed the "Public Art Greening Guide: A Practical Guide for Considering Environmentally Sustainable Practices in Public Art." The Guide is certainly not an in-depth checklist guaranteed to make your public art program sustainable in a day; its goal is to inspire consideration about the environmental impact of public art and provides ideas on how environmental factors can be considered. Because public art does not have its own rating system for "green" design (similar to Leadership in Energy Efficient Design-LEED-for building design), it is essential that further research on this subject be conducted as it applies both in content and process of public art. The suggestions also may not be appropriate for all public art projects or programs and should not stifle artistic expression and integrity or the reasons why we create art.

Like others in construction-related industries, many public art programs are anxious to address the degradation of our planet by adopting more sustainable practices.

Before approaching a sustainability plan for a public art project or program, one should consider:

- *What resources are available to your organization to aid you in the process of developing environmentally sustainable practices? Personnel / other municipal departments, monetary support, web-based resources, academic resources?*
- *What are your program's most ambitious goals for environmental sustainability? What goals are most feasible / what goals are going to be the most challenging? How do the goals fit within the goals of the program's umbrella organization (if there is one)?*

Within the Guide there are several suggestions that address both administrative and artistic decisions and processes. These are practical considerations. Conceptual ideas are discussed in my full research document. A practical way to illustrate how these suggestions might be implemented by public art programs are

through real life examples. Here are some tips from the Guide and the ways in which CCAA addresses environmental sustainability in its daily work (*please note that some of these processes were in place before I began my work with CCAA*):

Tip #1: *Encourage staff to carpool, use public transportation or walk to work. If you really want to experiment, allow employees to work from a home office two to three days per week.*

CCAA Application: Four administrative contractors manage CCAA and its activities. We all work from home offices and travel to in-person meetings when necessary. We have two staff meetings per month: one at County facilities and one Skype teleconference. The Board of Directors has substituted one monthly meeting per year with a teleconference.

Tip #2: *Down with bottled water! If there is a break room in your office, go to a second-hand store and purchase dishes for staff to use. Invest in a dishwasher rather than hand washing dishes.*

CCAA Application: CCAA does not have a break room. I cater many of the public art stakeholder committee meetings and have invested in a coffee carafe, electric teapot, water pitcher, coffee cups, plates and serving platters. Yes, this creates a little more work in hauling dishes around and washing them, but it is worth minimizing waste.

Tip #3: *Consider new technologies in public art to cut back on waste. Has your office switched to digital submission? What about a public art brochure that is downloadable from your website to a desktop, blackberry, or iphone?*

CCAA Application: CCAA has switched completely to digital submission for public art projects. Our public art steering committee conducted two artist interviews this year via Skype (one in Chicago and one in China) reducing the cost and the need for artists to travel. We are also in the process of uploading all of our installed projects to PublicEarth (www.publicearth.com), the Wiki of Places that will allow individuals to access photos and information about each public

art project via any Internet connection. (PublicEarth and Forecast Public Art are collaborating to map the world's public art and have created public art-specific search criteria).

Tip #4: *Public art can require a great amount of energy in its creation and, in some cases, to operate. Consider how the project can include renewable energy or simply cut back on energy usage.*

CCAA Application: While it is not currently policy, CCAA asks artists applying to projects to address environmental sustainability and the use of resources. If an artist plans to include lighting, we ask if energy-saving or solar technology is feasible. Any project requiring plant life should use native plants that do not require irrigation to survive. We ask, whenever possible, that the artists completing projects use local materials, fabricators, and contractors. To assist with this, we ensure the artist has access to a list of trusted individuals.

Tip #5: *Consider the materials and resources used in public artwork. Can the materials used be recycled after the life of the artwork for another purpose? Does the work use recycled materials? Does the artwork use toxic or hazardous materials for the environment or the artist? Where do the materials come from?*

CCAA Application: The TeleTales Project is one example of how CCAA has addressed this:

“TeleTales” is an ambitious undertaking for the Department of Tourism & Cultural Affairs (TCA). TCA received a grant from the Oregon Arts Commission to create a series of recordings that would be accessible via a cell phone at thirty historical and heritage sites around Clackamas County. As the public visits these sites, they are directed to dial their cell phone to hear a short story and interesting information about the location.

TeleTales eliminates the need for elaborate printed materials (that tend to end up in the garbage) and brings new life to sites where limited resources do not allow for consistent staffing.

As the public art element, CCAA solicited artists on behalf of TCA to design a device (signage or sculptural work) that could be easily replicated for each heritage site that directs visitors to dial their cell phone to access the stories. An open Call to Artists was released and a stakeholder committee selected Bend, Oregon artist Cara Thayer's design for the TeleTales sign. She worked with Turtledove Clemans, a local marketing firm, to make the signs cost effective to replicate.

The final designs are printed on recycled roadway signs pulled directly from the County's sign "graveyard". (The old highway markings are still visible on the backs of the signs). Thirty TeleTales signs have been sited at various heritage sites throughout Clackamas County. The entire resulting project produced minimal waste. A small number of brochures were printed that list all TeleTales sites, but the materials and energy used are far less than individual interpretive materials for each site (<http://www.mthoodterritory.com/teletales.jsp>).

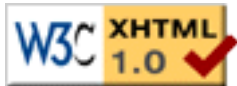
Tip #6: *Finally, artists are among the most creative and innovative professionals in the world. What groundbreaking ideas regarding environmental sustainability are infused in the artwork? What credentials does the artist bring into the picture regarding environmental sustainability?*

CCAA Application: Public art programs across the United States benefit from the collaboration with a diverse and knowledgeable number of individuals—artists among them. Be open to the creative approaches and solutions that artists bring to the table. Other collaborators (project managers, other departments, engineers, other public art programs) can teach you a lot; develop healthy relationships with them and it can contribute to the program's ability to address environmental sustainability, and also to the overall sustainability of the program. With each project comes an opportunity to expand the abilities of the program. Take advantage of these resources and share your own to do your part in contributing to a sustainable future!

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