

Frequently asked questions on commissioning a public art project

Looking for insights into the practicalities of applying for, commissioning and working through public art projects? Our FAQs will help guide you through the process.

What is commissioning?

Having access to public money to commission an artist is a unique and exciting opportunity. Commissioning means selecting and contracting an artist who has proposed a new and unique art work across a range of art forms/contexts for your building or community.

How do I find out about commissioning opportunities?

[Visit our Opportunities section to find out more.](#)

Local Authorities and artist resource organisations are also good sources of information:

www.artscouncil.ie/Arts-in-Ireland/Festivals/Resource-Organisations

www.artscouncil.ie/Arts-in-Ireland/Local,-Place-and-Public-Art/Links

What is an Artist's Statement?

An Artist's Statement is a text in which you describe the motivation behind your practice. Ideally it should offer the reader an insight into your creative concepts; the artistic processes and techniques you use; and the various and unique influences behind your art practice. It is usually about 500 words long; in some circumstances an edited version of about 70 to 100 words is appropriate.

Clear and informative, the statement explains why you have chosen to make the work, while expanding on the conceptual elements of your practice. As a very revealing introduction to your practice, it's more effective when it's true and original. You may need different versions of your statement for different situations and application procedures.

What is a steering group/committee?

A steering group or committee represents the concerns of the commissioner; it's often a Local Authority or government body. Criticisms of steering committees are often levelled on the basis that there is not enough artistic representation; this can result in decisions or orientations that don't take full advantage of the potential scope of public art. Under representation of artists on steering committees stymies the ability to engage with or represent current artistic practice.

What is the role of the steering group?

While this varies considerably, in essence the role of the group or committee is to guide a commission through the project's initial brief, selection and realisation. The committee may seek a specialist curator to support them in drawing up a brief and in sourcing artists.

Why can steering groups appear so bureaucratic?

A committee-based approach is most relevant to Local Authorities and government departments that spend public monies. As with all committees, the aim behind the formation of steering committees is to support transparency and fair administrative procedures.

As with all committee work, the focus can take too hard a turn towards processes that don't reflect context; they can become introverted and self-serving rather than outward-looking and thus fail to deliver on its vision of support. Ideally a committee should prioritise an ability to take risks; support innovation, new work and the consolidation of ideas; and allow space to develop an existing artistic practice in discussion with the artist.

Who sits on these committees?

A steering group should operate like a strong company board, with a healthy balance of skill sets and representative voices. Where there are concerns about technical, social or financial issues or other particular challenges, the steering group will consider these and provide a range of supportive opinions and take advice from relevant professionals in order to make the best decision possible.

How involved is the steering group in the whole process?

Steering group involvement varies, in deference to offering a degree of autonomy to the project manager/administrator. Rather than 'hands-on' support, they offer 'big picture' assistance. When the project is in full flow, project managers/administrators (or in some cases artists) should keep the group up-to-date on timelines, budget, artistic direction/changes and general progression.