Creating a Community Mural

By Keep America Beautiful

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, N.M., 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 the mural process through pictures and journals, displaying photos at the dedication ceremony. To create a community paint-brush mural, use these guidelines based on Keep Albuquerque Beautiful’s checklist:

**Secure Partners**
- Estimate the amount of supplies needed and costs. Costs are likely to be anywhere from $5,000 to $25,000. Expenses will depend on the size of the wall, the need for scaffolding, and any artist fees.
- Seek funding from non-profit and municipal 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.

**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.
- 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.

**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.

**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, chalk-line, rags, drinking water, sodas, snacks, buckets, mixing sticks, and sunscreen.

• A 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.

**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.

**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 creating the mural – from those making donations to volunteers.

**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 the completed mural.

• Cleanup around the site. This will help to show off the mural.

**About the author:** Through a variety of national programs and initiatives with more than 600 community-based affiliates and partner organizations, Keep America Beautiful engages more than 5 million volunteers in an effort to end littering, improve recycling, and beautify America’s communities. To learn more about Keep America Beautiful, visit [www.kab.org](http://www.kab.org).
Community Murals in PA

Throughout the Commonwealth, communities have taken open space and viewed it a bit differently, transforming buildings into murals that welcome visitors, give nods to a town’s history, or celebrate beautification. The following is a sampling of borough mural projects and programs from around PA.

**Bangor Borough, Northampton County**

In partnership with the Bangor Main Street Program, a broad-based mural and arts program was developed for Bangor Borough, Northampton County. It started in 2008 and has become an integral part of the redevelopment strategy of the region. After the success of this first mural, Jim Gloria founded the Heritage Mural Education Program. The goals and objectives are to promote and preserve the region’s heritage; complement a proposed historic district; highlight local art and artists; provide educational opportunities; and be a catalyst for branding and marketing efforts.


**Quakertown Borough, Bucks County**

Quakertown Alive!, the Bucks County borough’s downtown non-profit revitalization group, helped spearhead a mural on an east-facing wall at Front Street and Route 313. Painted by artist Jared Bader, it includes 10 iconic images such as the old QNB Bank and Liberty Bell, which were created from historic photos. The mural was unveiled this fall during the Upper Bucks Brewfest, a fundraising event sponsored by Quakertown Alive!. The area around the mural is slated to be developed as a pocket park. View photos on [https://www.facebook.com/QtownAlive](https://www.facebook.com/QtownAlive).

**West Reading Borough, Berks County**

West Reading Borough, Berks County, has its very own mural corridor, created with the help of its Elm Street Program. West Reading Community Revitalization Foundation’s Cherry Street Mural Corridor spans several blocks and includes 15 murals. This outdoor “art gallery” is intended to expose the widest audience possible to various styles and techniques of artistic expression and to attract creative people to the community. For more information, visit [www.lovecwestreading.com](http://www.lovecwestreading.com).

**Moscow and Jessup Boroughs, Lackawanna County**

Rail bridge murals in Moscow and Jessup boroughs, Lackawanna County, were completed in 2015. The Jessup Bridge on Constitution Avenue and Delaware Street was painted by artist Heather Evans in grayscale and highlights Jessup’s sawmill, mining, and old-world connections. The Moscow Bridge at Market and North Main streets showcases in its mural the history, culture, and landmarks of the borough, along with the four seasons of northeastern PA and was painted by artist Catherine Badget. For more information, visit [www.lackawannacounty.org](http://www.lackawannacounty.org) and click on “News and Events,” and then “Press Releases,” and then search for the information.
Painted by artist Carrie Kingsbury, this mural on Malven Pizza, Malvern Borough, depicts the Victorian era life in the small railroad town.

**Malvern Borough, Chester County**

Since 2013, Malvern Borough, Chester County, has completed or has in development six public art displays as part of the borough’s redevelopment and beautification projects. For example, through the Malvern Community Arts Project, the Malvern Pizza building on King Street was transformed into a Victorian street scene, depicting the era of the small railroad town by artist Carrie Kingsbury.

Other murals include one on a business near the train station, at the public library, on a bridge, and in the borough hall/library lobby. The murals connect the history with the present – from Gen. Anthony Wayne to honoring the borough’s 125th Anniversary with “Malvern Today.” All projects go through an approval process with borough council, said the group’s founder, Kristen Thomas. You can learn more at https://www.facebook.com/MalvernMuralProject/?fref=ts. 

[Photo credit: Campli Photography]