

**"THE ROLE OF THE ARTIST IS TO
MAKE REVOLUTION IRRESISTIBLE."**

-TONI CADE BAMBARA



STREET MURAL MANUAL

**DAVID SOLNIT, CLIMATE JUSTICE
ARTS PROJECT**



KELLY JONES | REVOLUTIONARY PHOTOGRAPHY

WHY PAINT THE STREETS?

RECLAIM: Street murals reclaim our public space from cars and capital and can be a way to escalate and hold our ground. Street murals are constructive creations in the face of destructive climate chaos.

PARTICIPATORY: A great way to involve a lot of people and work together with our hands to create together.

ART TELLS STORIES: Street murals and arts can reach people with our stories, including the stories of those in our region hurt by climate chaos—and those across the globe.

Artist-organizer Ricardo Levins Morales explains, “Humans are story-driven. We make choices according to how we understand the world to be. Art speaks directly to those deep inner spaces where the stories are stored. I use art to support people’s ability to believe in possibilities that go beyond the boundaries that are acceptable to the rulers.”

THANK YOU Emily Thiessen (@archipelagic) for reviewing and contributing to this manual with your wise tips and photos. Thank you Claudio Martinez for designing this manual. Appreciation for all who designed, painted, blocked streets, sang and spread street muraling for change, especially Idle No More SF Bay, Society of Fearless Grandmothers, Julie Searle, and 1000 Grandmothers for a Livable Future.

GUERRILLA STREET MURALS

Humans have always decorated and painted or drawn stories on the things around us, including the ground. Indigenous peoples in the Southwestern United States and Northern Mexico created sand paintings on the ground. Kolam or Muggu are geometric painting made of rice flour, stone powder or chalk by women in front of their homes across South Asia and in Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand. Street painting or pavement art has a rich history — from [Europe's pavement artists—Italian madonnari, the German strassenmaler, and the British screevers](#) — going back hundreds of years to today's global chalk art murals. In Portland, Oregon, United States neighborhoods [intersection murals are used for communities to organize themselves](#).

On May 1, 2012, Occupy SF, community groups, and unions in San Francisco created a giant street mural at the entrance to "Wall Street West" (Montgomery Street) in response to mass housing foreclosures and corporate capitalism. This practice of mass-participation giant guerrilla murals on the street spread. On August 6, 2011 the Chevron Oil refinery exploded in Richmond, California, sending 15000 local residents to nearby hospitals. A year later, to mark the anniversary thousands of people marched against the refinery, painting a giant sunflower directly in front of and blocking the main refinery entrance as 200 people were arrested sitting-in and blockading.





A 65-foot mural of Thunderbird Woman was painted at Wells Fargo Headquarters in San Francisco, calling attention to investments in the Dakota Access pipeline in solidarity with Standing Rock Indigenous resistance. [A “Remember and Protect” street mural](#) was painted in Napa in 2018 to commemorate the devastating climate fires, drawn with charcoal from the North Bay fires and red clay paint from the foothills of the Sierra Mountains (Indigenous Miwok territory).

In 2018, as the Governor of California hosted a global climate summit, the Society of Fearless Grandmothers blockaded 5 blocks of streets around City Hall, and [50 different community and movement groups painted giant murals in those streets](#), showing their solutions to climate chaos.

Street murals continued to spread to social change movements across North America and around the globe: striking McDonalds workers, migrants rights, teachers unions, global solidarity movements, but especially in the climate justice and Indigenous sovereignty movements.

In 2020, the Black Lives Matter uprising in the United States created hundreds of giant “Black Lives Matter” murals in towns and cities across the country, inspired by the 2 block long “Black Lives Matter” mural painted by the City of DC directly in front of the Trump- occupied White House.

A high-angle, close-up photograph of a person's hands and arms, wearing a red and white striped long-sleeved shirt, painting a mural. The person is holding a paintbrush and dipping it into a can of red paint. The workspace is cluttered with numerous open paint cans in various colors (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple, black, white) and several paintbrushes. The background is a dark, textured surface, likely a wall or a large canvas, with some paint splatters visible. The overall scene is vibrant and artistic.

STREET MURAL STEPS

Here are the basic steps. Below, we go in-depth for each of these.

- Location: where to paint?
- Safety: police, authorities, traffic
- Types of mural materials
- Paint
- Supplies
- Design
- Layout
- Painting tips
- Roles

While you are painting . . .

- Documentation

LOCATION: WHERE TO PAINT?

Here's some criteria to think about:

SYMBOL

Is it next to a bank or financial institution you are targeting?

ICONIC

Is it a well known iconic location?

PUBLIC

Is it in a place with a lot of people who will see it?

DOABLE

Can you pull it off at your chosen location? If not, some groups may choose

a safer location, a sidewalk, or even a paved area connected to a friendly community group, institution or business

VISIBLE

Is there a location to get a good view and photo from above, or a good location for photos and videos?

TIMING

- When is the best time of day to paint the mural?
- Does it work well with action or mobilization plans?

- When can you get people to join you?
- What time of day is best for paint to dry? Avoid painting too late in the day if your town gets cool or moist in the evening.
- Are there times when your mural site is in sun or shade that affects visibility or drying time?

SAFETY: POLICE, AUTHORITIES, TRAFFIC

Every city and each group are different and will need to consider how and where they can paint their street mural, and how to keep participants safe — or decide on what level of risk they will take. In some places, groups will choose to do unpermitted or “guerrilla” murals. In other cities groups may choose to seek permission.

Here are some of the things to consider when making plans:

TRAFFIC: How will you keep the mural area safe from car traffic? It's important for safety to block or re-route car traffic from the area you will paint your mural in, to keep participants safe. This is sometimes done by blocking lanes, with people holding banners, sometimes wearing traffic vests and using traffic

barriers to stop or redirect traffic.

POLICE: How can we paint a street mural without the police or other authorities stopping us? How will you interact with police? Having a police liaison/s, some group find can help to calm them down, back them off or buy time.

Having lots of people, including people from different groups or communities, and having media present, can help. Being well organized, and being prepared to hold your space can also help. There are also options of location and types of mural that are less escalated or challenging to authorities.

LOCATION: Another factor is your location. Some groups may choose to paint on a sidewalk or a plaza, in a

neighborhood or even on the pavement of a friendly community group, institution or business.

TYPE OF MURAL: There are many ways to make a mural, and some may be more challenging to authorities, like using permanent paint. Tempera and clay paint are washable so may be less challenging, and chalk murals even less so. Another option is to paint your mural on the pavement, but on your own canvas or painting surface.

Here's a rundown of the different options.

TYPES OF MURALS & MATERIALS

There are many ways to make a mural, and some may be more or less challenging to authorities.

PERMANENT PAINT: Permanent paint, like that used on houses or acrylic artists' paint, which won't easily wash off.



This "SACRED SITE" mural was painted on the street at the Indigenous Ohlone Shellmound Sacred Site in Berkeley, CA, USA. It was painted with permanent water-based masonry paint, and is still up 6 months later. Photo: Brooke Anderson.

CHALK MURAL: You can make a mural using sidewalk chalk.



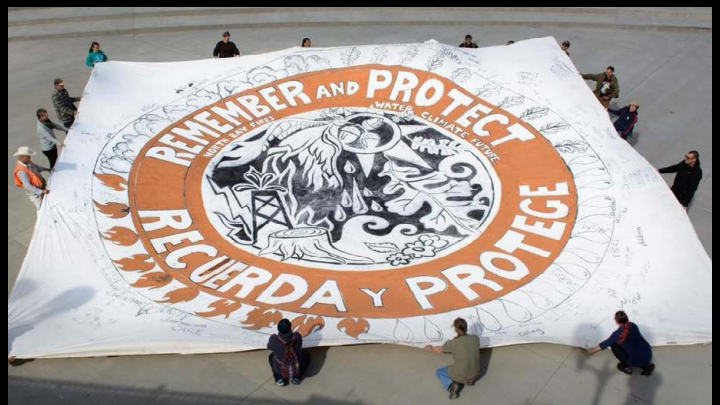
This mural was made with chalk and charcoal used for the "BIDEN." then brushed with water to make it smooth and solid. Treaty People gathering: Thousands gather in Northern Minnesota to stop Line 3. Photo: Don Gosney @blackcloudstudios

TEMPERA AND CLAY PAINT: Non-toxic and water soluble, these can be washed off or will come off in rain. (more info below)



Thunderbird Woman tempera mural painted at bank headquarters. San Francisco, Nov. 6, 2017

BRING YOUR OWN CANVAS MURAL: Some groups have actually brought their own painting surface, giant cloth (priming it with white paint makes it easier to paint and can stop the paint from bleeding through. This option also means you can keep the mural and use it again).



This mural in Napa, California, USA was made with charcoal from recent climate fires and clay paint on a large 13 meter fabric canvas that was primed/painted in advance with a coat of white paint. Photo: Peg Hunter.

PAINT



Basic colors of tempera paint on cement.

TEMPERA PAINT

This is the kind of water soluble paint kids use in school. It's inexpensive and usually non-toxic, comes in a wide range of colors, is easy to use, and can be thinned with water. If paint is spilled or a mistake is made, it is easy to wipe off with water and rags. It can be dissolved and washed off with water after it dries.

SHOP: It's often sold at school and education supply stores most cheaply, and also at children's/toy stores and at arts supply and craft stores. Quality and prices can vary, so it's worth checking prices and buying a sample to test quality. "Washable" types of tempera are often weaker in color.

THINNING: If the tempera is thick, you may want to thin it with water. It's best to have it thinned so it paints easily, dries faster, and uses less paint, but not so watery that the color is not strong or it does not cover pavement. Pour your paint from the containers it came in into 5 gallon buckets in advance and then add water to it gradually (this can be easier to do in advance)..

MIXING: You can choose to mix new colors. It's best to test in very small batches till you get the color you want, paying attention to how much of what colors work well, so you can use the same proportions for a bigger batch.

CLAY PAINT

You can make clay paint yourself with ceramic clay, which comes in many natural earth colors, including white (porcelain). Powdered oxides or stains can be added to make additional colors (you can also get these at your local pottery supply store). You can also use naturally found clay that has been dug up from the ground.

Here are some simple steps.

DRY: Cut moist clay into thin slices, easiest with a thin wire with some type of handles/small sticks on either end. Let it dry in a warm, dry or sunny place.

BREAK UP: When clay is dry, crush it up into smaller pieces.

SOAK: Put dry clay into a bucket--not more than 2/3 full. Fill with water so all the clay is submerged.

MIX: Mix using a paint mixing attachment on a corded drill, adding additional water a little at a time to get a thin paint consistency--so it will paint easily and dry faster, but not so watery that the color is weak or it does not cover the pavement.

REMIX: Clay paint settles and needs to be remixed before painting, usually stirring with a stick is enough.



Colors of clay paint made from ceramic clay

To make oxide powder paint: just mix the powder with water. Wear a mask to avoid breathing in the particles.

CLIMATE IMPACTS PAINT: One way to include the reality of climate chaos in our communities and around the world is to actually paint with it, using ash and charcoal from climate fires to make grey and black paint, or using mud from climate flooding and storms. Here's a mural made with charcoal from fires in California (add LINK) and another example from the group [@cinzasdafloresta](https://www.instagram.com/cinzasdafloresta) (Ashes of Forest) in Brazil that is making paint from the ashes of fires in the Amazon and painting murals. .

HOW MUCH PAINT? Approximate estimate: 1 gallon (nearly 4 litres) for each 5 square meters (32 square feet). So if your mural was 5 meters high and 6 meters wide you would need about 6 gallons of paint.

You can estimate what percentage of what color based on your design sketch. Things that will change how much paint you will need are: how thick/thin your paint is, how heavily people paint (tip: paint thin and spread out paint before dipping brush again, so it will dry more quickly), and the texture of the pavement – smooth surfaces take less paint than a rough surface.

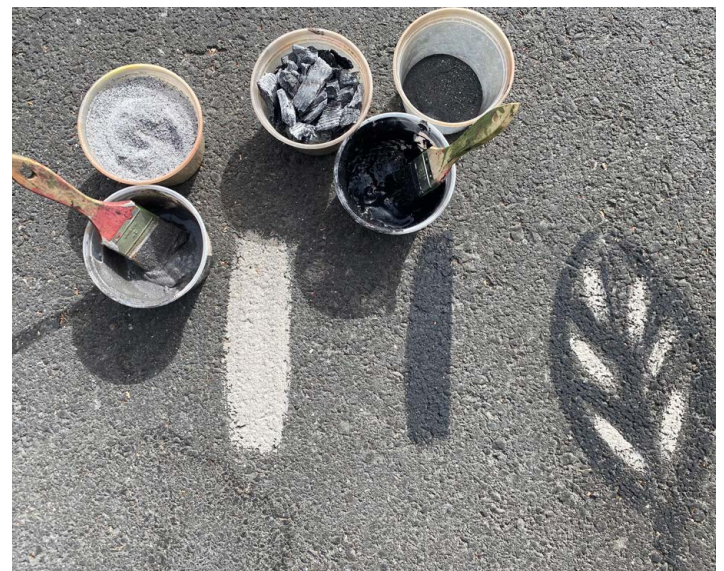
PERMANENT PAINT

For more permanent street murals, you can use housepaint or acrylic paint. To make the mural more durable, you can buy paint designed for outdoor pavement or masonry. Water-based paint is easier to clean up and dries faster. If it's water based it will say "clean up with water" (and maybe soap).

CHALK

Artists and groups around the world make powerful chalk murals. Artist-activists from the group Chalk Riot have shared a great guide on using chalk for sidewalks, streets, and more: chalkriotart.com/chalkthevote

Some groups have used charcoal (like for a barbeque grill) as a black chalk, and gypsum-based construction plaster board (sheet rock, drywall, etc -- which can sometimes be recycled from building sites) for white chalk. Painting over the chalk with water can help smooth the chalking and look more like paint. As always, experiment and practice ahead of time.



Paint from sifted wildfire ash (light grey) and ground and sifted wildfire burnt tree charcoal (black) mixed with 2 parts cornstarch wheatpaste.



KELLY JOHNSON REVOLUTIONARY PHOTOGRAPHY

SUPPLIES

Here are some of the other supplies you will need:

Layout Supplies:

CHALK

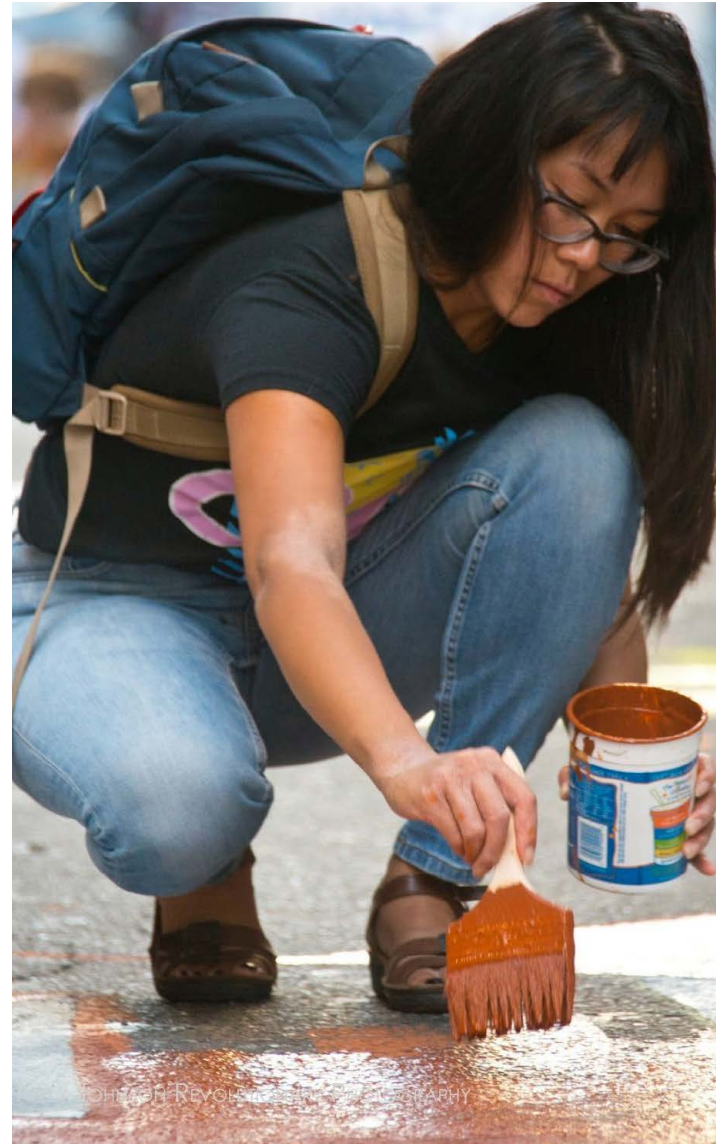
- Thicker sidewalk chalk for making big lines.
- Stick: You can make a chalk holder from a bamboo stick, tube/pipe or taped between two sticks, which is really helpful to be able to layout while standing up.
- Thinner chalkboard chalk for details.

STRING: Use to make circles and pull tight between two points to make straight lines.

MEASURING TAPE: To measure distances as needed

STRAIGHT EDGE: You may want to bring a straight stick to draw straight lines. You can also use a chalk reel (from a hardware store) to make straight lines.

STENCIL TEMPLATE: for complicated shapes, you can cut out the shape in paper in advance and then lay in place and trace with chalk.



PAINTING

Paintbrushes and rollers:

Paint Brushes: Large paint brushes for filling big areas, and smaller for detail. Lots of paint brushes for lots of people to participate. You may want to have a brush “wash station” – two containers with water-- if you need to clean some brushes to use with another color. Advantage of paint bushes: brushes are easier for more people to participate with, and better to paint details and edges with. Bigger paint brushes are faster.

Rollers: Advantages – painting more surface faster. For each paint roller, you will need a “sleeve” that slides over and holds the paint and a tray or bucket dip the roller into. Some practice ahead of time helps to do this well.

CONTAINERS: Bucket and containers to transport paint and dip paint from. Re-used yogurt or food containers, or other recycled containers.

LADLES: (from a thrift store) are useful for scooping paint from big buckets into small containers

RAGS: to clean spills, mistakes, and hands.

WATER: having enough water to thin paint, clean up spills or mistakes and wash hands is helpful.

Carrying Bags or Boxes: to carry supplies. A cart to transport can be helpful.

Photo by Colin Smith

DESIGN

With images, words, and colors, choose the message, image and story you want to communicate. You can involve your groups or community. You may work with an artist who can help with or create a design. Are there words, images and colors that are meaningful in your community?

Here are a few tips:

CONTRAST: light-dark contrast makes images and words pop and be more visible.

IMAGES: Add an image or images for another dimension, if your design is just words.

WORDS: Short lines of poetry or song lyrics can be more powerful and communicate in a different way

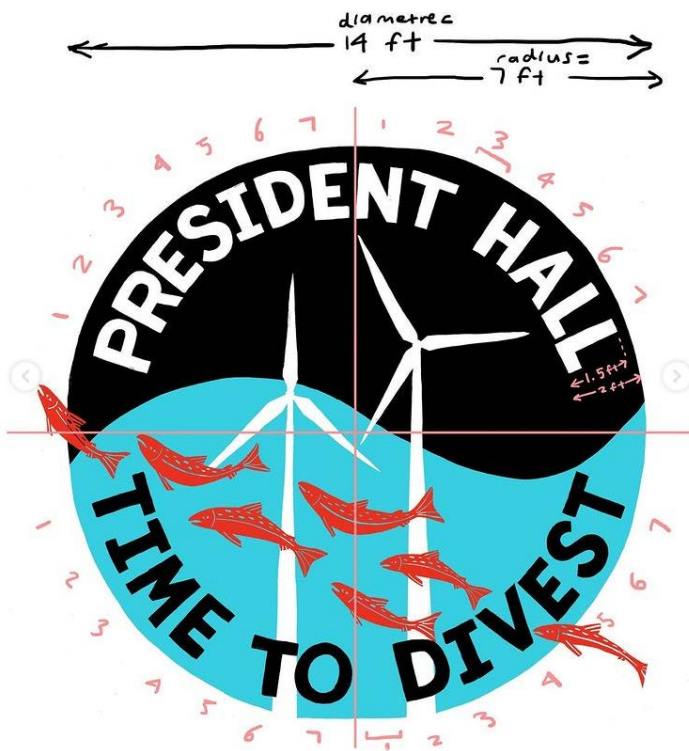
SIMPLE: Keep it simple enough so that you can complete the layout and painting with the people and supplies you have within the time you have.

VISIBLE: Can you make it bold and simple enough that it can be easily read and understood?

ORIENTATION: Which direction should the mural face? Facing away from the target location--like a bank--can make it easily seen and read in person and when doing documentation with the bank in the background.

SKETCH: Make a sketch or drawing of your design and color it in with colored pencils, watercolors, etc (or on a computer with graphic design program). It may help to print a satellite, aerial or street map of the street you are painting. You can also measure the street, with a tape measure, with pre-measured lengths of string or rope or estimating by counting your walking paces, then measuring the length of your pace and multiplying. Make several color copies (or black and white and color them in) before you paint--enough so everyone laying it out can have one. Put them on a clipboard or tape to a piece of cardboard so they don't blow away or get damaged by paint. This helps so many people can see the design concept as they are laying it out and painting.





Mural painted by Divest UVic at the University of Victoria to "welcome" a new president of the university. Photos by Colin Smith.

LAYOUT TIPS

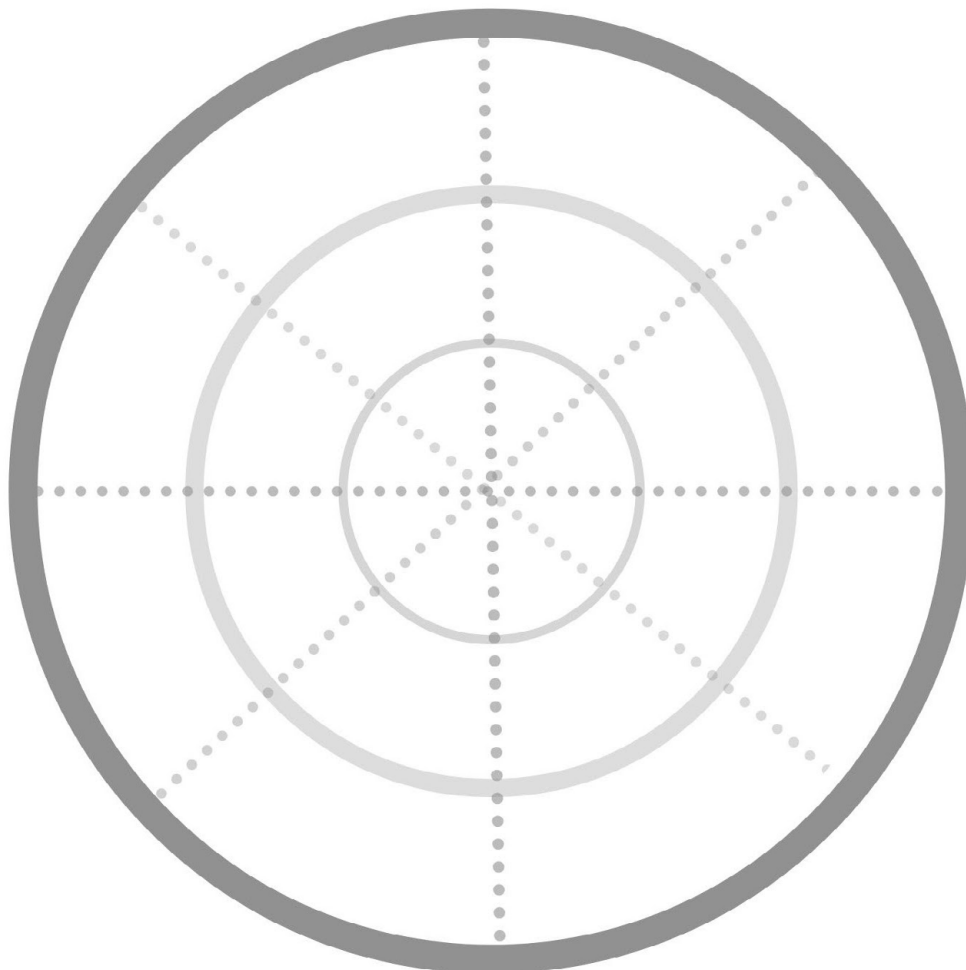
MARK OUTSIDE OF MURAL: It can help to locate or measure and chalk the outside perimeter of your mural. If it's circular, see "Circle Grid" below, but if it is square or rectangle you may want to make a grid on your sketch and in the street to help you transfer the design. Then you can divide into different sections or elements, to make sure everything fits. Measuring the space in advance and having the measurements on your sketch will help to transfer design from sketch to street.

CIRCLE GRID: if you have a circular design or a circle image you can use a human compass; march the center with chalk, tie a loop on one end of shrink and hold in center with a stick. Laying the design out on a circle grid on your sketch can help to transfer it onto the ground. If transferring an image from your sketch, you can, for example, measure & make circles on

your sketch for every meter in from the edge – at 1 meter, 2 meters in and 3 meters. You can also divide the circle across in quarters or eighths like a pie--and also do this in you mural sketch to make it easy to transfer the design.

TEMPLATES: If you have complicated images you could choose to cut the shape/s out of paper the size you want for your mural and then trace them. This can be done with wide rolls of heavy paper--or whatever alternative you can find.

LETTERING: Lightly chalk the space for each word—including the tops and bottom lines of the words, then for each individual letter, so you know everything will fit. Then layout each letter very lightly, and go over with a heavier chalk line when it's good. You can use a straight edge or stick to make lines straight.





PAINTING TIPS

PRACTICE: Even if you do a 1-2 meter small version on a driveway or sidewalk, it's amazingly helpful to actually practice laying it out, getting paint ready, working with your team and painting--and to see how it looks.

FACILITATE YOUR MURAL PAINTING: It's up to your team to facilitate the painting of your mural--invite other folks to help you, but it's up to you to direct them.

Here are some tips.

COLOR MARK: Color mark each mural area--make a light dab of color, so people won't have any confusion about what the right color is.

PAINT AND BRUSHES READY: When you are ready to paint the mural, you can quickly hand supplies out and direct participants where to paint.

CLEAR DIRECTION: Ask people to paint, and help them know where to paint and show them how to paint a thin coat--and spread the paint out until it is thin, before dipping brush again.

AVOID TRAPPING: Decide to paint which colors and areas to paint first, so people will be able to reach the other colors and areas.

STEPPING STONES AND PATHWAYS: As the mural has more areas painted, it can help to keep some unpainted pathways for people to get in and out without stepping in wet paint, or have a bunch of cardboard scraps you can use as stepping stones.

CLEAN UP ALL SUPPLIES: Keep track of your supplies, wipe up any spills outside your mural, and remove supplies when finished painting.

CONSOLIDATE PAINT: Use a brush to empty all the remaining paint of each color into a larger or a few containers. Place the brushes in the empty containers of the same color. Pack containers, brushes, etc into a bucket, box or bag for easier transport when you leave. Until you leave, you may want to keep one container and brush of each color available for touch up.

ROLES

STREET MURAL ROLES

PAINT BARRISTAS: Set up supplies, paint, and brushes in one area, they may also pass out paint to participants, refill paint, collect paint and brushes when participants are done--and clean up and pack up. They should be in touch with the layout team and the mural facilitators so they know which colors are needed when and can direct people to the mural facilitators for direction of where to paint.

LAYOUT TEAM: People who can layout the design – ideally they have practiced and have a clear sketch of the design.

PAINTING FACILITATORS: These facilitators will invite people in to paint the mural, show them what to do, and make sure painters have what they need. This could include the Layout team when they are done laying out design.

POLICE/PUBLIC LIAISON: These folks will communicate with police or others about what we are doing, making sure to keep to keep the mural space safe.

STREET SAFETY: This team will make sure the mural area is safely blocked off from vehicles so the muralists can safely focus on layout and painting.

STORYTELLERS: These folks will tell the story of the mural -- and the community, movement, or group -- to the public. These can also be your mural team's media spokespeople. It can be a great chance to narrate your mural and share your story with thousands of people.

SONG LEADERS: Does your group or community have song leaders that can lead and sing while the mural is happening?

DOCUMENTATION: People to document, both to share immediately on social media and to amplify your story with a visual record.





DOCUMENTATION

VISIBLE: When planning your mural, consider if there are places where it can be seen and filmed. This might be from a high point on a building, from an A-frame ladder, or with a drone.

PLAN: Doing our own documentation and media is how we show and tell our story ourselves. Below are a few things to consider. Also think about outreach to mainstream or other independent media. Plan who will document, and how you will edit and share on social media and other channels.

Possible documentation roles:

PHOTOS: document the process of painting, the finished mural and maybe a group photo of people with mural.

VIDEO: Is there a plan to edit the footage into a short video and share it out?

TIME LAPSE VIDEO: Setting this up from a high view can make for strong, fun documentation.

DRONE PHOTO/VIDEO: Often the best way to document a street mural is from the sky.

WRITTEN ACCOUNT/Article





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