How to create a community mural

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What are they?
Community mural projects allow people to develop their individuality and confidence through creative visual expression and to experience a positive social collaboration. A mural is a large image painted or affixed to a wall. Murals can be painted by one person, but the process of developing a mural collectively is very powerful. Collective murals give voice to a whole community. The collaborative mural process is accessible and can involve people of all ages and skill levels. Murals bring art into public spaces and allow people to reflect their concerns, joys, values and histories. They beautify the community, attract public attention and can educate people by illustrating messages about social or environmental issues.

What are the benefits?
A mural project has two important features: the process and the product. In the process, diverse individuals come together to develop a vision and work collectively to achieve a common goal. The merit of this educational process is that everyone is valued for his or her contribution, and success is based on participants' ability to support one another in reaching their goal.

This process also leaves a product--the mural. The mural does more than instill community pride. It serves as a conspicuous reminder that by working jointly the community can meet its challenges.

How to design them

Designing the mural collectively generates dialogue, creativity and active participation that's inclusive of everyone.

Start talking about it	Invite participants to the project through community mobilization strategies, which include informal and formal discussions and presentations.
Choose a topic	Assess and prioritize relevant issues through focus groups and community meetings. Have a brainstorm! Ask people to throw out all ideas, respecting everyone's opinion. Work with the NGO to determine the areas of focus. Themes can include: social concerns, the world the way you would like to see it, cultural symbols of things we value in life, current events, a myth or historical story.
Make the design	Facilitate community meetings to talk about the issues and develop a mural design. The design can be generated through a consensus process. In your workshops, invite everyone to draw or bring in a picture of what they would like to see in the mural based on their experience or research of the theme. Allow each participant to describe and share their drawing with the group. Begin to group common images together and form connections. * If an individual has many images, you can ask them to choose the most important.*
Finalize the design	Arrange all of the different images into a large composite sketch. You can tell a story from left to right, middle out, top to bottom, or bottom to top. The final drawing can be drawn to scale on paper and colored in by the group with colored pencils.

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How to make them

Anyone can paint a mural! With some good coordination, collaboration, imagination and fun, you can facilitate an empowering process for the whole community. Before, during and after pictures tell a great story!

Select your wall	Check the condition of the wall for cracks, peeling, grime, etc. Is it accessible and easily seen by a lot of people? Is it facing the sun all day? Find out who is in charge of the building and get permission. If appropriate, ask if they can financially support the project. You can also consider a portable mural on plywood that is primed, rather than painting directly on the wall.	*(continued)* **Paint your mural**	2. Paint from the top to the bottom - in case the paint drips, you won't ruin completed work. Try to use acrylic paint. It is more durable if mixed with gloss or matte acrylic varnish or extender. 3. Paint together! Coordinate community members in different work groups who can work on specific tasks: material preparation, sketching, individual painting, organized group painting by segment, clean-up, feedback, etc. Work with a group size you feel comfortable working with. If a group is too big, things may get out of hand and you may feel overwhelmed with demands and questions. People are usually fine with taking turns and having time limits. 4. Include the NGO and ArtCorps names and logos on the mural.
Prep your wall	Clean it, scrub it, brush it, show it love. With so many different types of walls or surfaces out there, it's important to prep it well so that all of your efforts don't go to waste. During rainy season it's best to use oil paint. Prep the wall with white paint mixed with thinner so it can stretch a little. In the sun and heat you can use acrylic or water based paint. It dries quickly so make any corrections as soon as possible. It also allows you to work in layers, with more colors.	**Keep it clean!**	Always keep your area clean. You don't want to hear indirect comments or get penalized by the community for the mess you left behind. Cover the ground about 6 ft in front of the wall and under the paint station. Use nylon (it's cheap and sold by the yard) to cover your work area. Teach respect for the materials! Make sure that paintbrushes aren't left to dry and harden in the sun; if they aren't being used, make sure they are in containers of water, or cleaned immediately.
Create a grid	First make a grid on your drawing and then on your wall. A tape measure or rope will help to draw straight lines. Transfer the design of the mural one square at a time. Charcoal can be expensive or difficult to find but is good to draw with as it's extremely visible. Natural charcoal or dry pastels are good alternatives.	**Present the mural**	Work with individuals in the community to organize a celebration and dedicate the community mural. Try to get media coverage. Recognize all of the participants, contributors and donors.
Paint your mural	1. Paint the outline first. At times the white background can confuse or distort images and lines. Once your outline is painted and you're satisfied with it continue with the largest blocks of color; building on top of each color with details and highlights when ready. * *Pre-mixing colors before you start painting can save a lot of time and hassle. Remove grid lines with a damp cloth or pink erasers.*	**Follow-up activities**	Use the mural to generate curriculum or dialogue. Organize classes or groups to take a tour and discuss what they see. Get feedback--do interviews and ask people what they like and how they think it benefits the community. Set up a community group or committee who will take care of and preserve the mural over the years.

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Materials list

- **Paint containers -** about 20. They can be cut-out plastic bottles and re-used once the paint is dry.

- **Small brushes -** size 10 to 15. (small brushes work better for kids to work slowly, with more precision and less dripping!)

- **Big brushes -** use big or wide brushes for large surfaces.

- **Metallic brush -** to brush fungus, chipped paint and dirt from wall (wearing a mask is recommended when doing this). A broom and water may be good enough for some walls. Use the metallic brush to clean paintbrushes when finished for the day.

- **Paint -** depending on the size of the mural, buy a gallon or a quarter gallon of white, black, primary blue, primary red and primary yellow. You can mix and make the rest of your colors.
    - **Acrylic/wall paint -** just need water to clean up.
    - **Oil paint or esmalte -** Oil based paint has more intense colors and is more resistant to time and weather, but you need thinner or turpentine with it. It is more toxic/smelly and complicated to use.

- **Tarp -** a big piece of plastic to keep the floor clean and to put underneath all of your mixing/paint area.

- **Crayons, chalk, charcoal or dry pastels -** (pastels are the best) to make the sketch on the wall.

- **Mural designs sketched on paper or in saved in your digital camera, covered with a plastic sleeve -** to base your design upon. The plastic sleeve is to protect your sketches or camera.

- **Turpentine -** if using oil based paints.

- **Cloths or rags -** to wash hands, floors and other things.

- **Ladders/chairs/tables or scaffold -** to reach high places. Search and ask the town hall, stores, ferreterías and other people if they can lend or donate materials.   Remember to keep them clean by covering them with plastic and tape!

- **Sealer -** to give a first coat to a virgin wall.

- **Primer** *(optional)* **-** for an already painted or dark wall.

- **Stucco** *(optional)* **-** for walls that have uneven surfaces - you might want to ask for help from experienced people.

- **Sheercoat** *(optional)* **-** to give a protective coating on top of the mural.