

Toolkits for the Arts

TOOLKIT 3: ORGANIZE AN ART POP-UP SHOP

In a marketplace increasingly dominated by online retailers, many communities around the country are using innovative strategies to promote sales of locally made art, crafts, and other goods. Among such strategies, pop-up shops have proven to be effective tools for driving business back home and encouraging people to shop locally. These temporary shops and markets “pop up” for a limited period of time and help create a buzz around local vendors selling local products.

Looking at examples from West Virginia and beyond, this toolkit is designed to:

- discuss why a pop-up art shop may be a good fit for your community, and
- walk through the steps and other considerations when organizing a pop-up art shop.

OTHER TOOLKIT TOPICS

This document is the third installment in a six-part series of toolkits published by the Tamarack Foundation for the Arts. Funded by an “Our Town” grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, this series provides straightforward guidance to help individuals, communities, arts councils, and other creative entities implement local initiatives for the visual arts. Other installments in this series include:

1. Create an arts organization
2. Form an artist cooperative
3. Host a pop-up art shop
4. Organize a studio tour
5. Arrange an art walk
6. Lead a public mural project

About the Tamarack Foundation for the Arts

The Tamarack Foundation for the Arts (TFA) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to cultivating an empowering ecosystem that provides artists, businesses, and communities the tools and support needed to learn, connect, and thrive. TFA convenes a range of initiatives and programming that aim to help West Virginia artists prosper from their creative practice and make meaningful contributions to the well-being of our communities. More information is available at tamarackfoundation.org.

WHAT IS AN ART POP-UP?

An art pop-up shop is a temporary market where local vendors can sell their art, crafts, or other goods. Lasting anywhere from a day to several months, pop-up shops sometimes function as a makeshift quasi-storefront for individual artists, while others serve as impromptu art and craft fairs. In effect, pop-up shops showcase local vendors, promote buying locally, and increase the presence of the arts in a community.

The idea was born in the heart of New York City in the mid-2000s when a growing community of artists feeling constrained by limited gallery space began opening small, temporary art displays at various business locations or vacant spaces throughout the city. This collaboration between the arts and business community kicked off a worldwide trend that has gained popularity in towns of all sizes due to the informal nature and ease of hosting.

Art pop-ups can take many different forms. Here are examples of a few common types:

- A restaurant, café, or other local business features an artist for a day, setting up booths and/or displays of the artist's work within the venue.
- An individual artist sets up a temporary shop in an empty storefront, existing business, outdoor tent, or other location for a few weeks. (Businesses considering opening their own location sometimes run a pop-up shop as a time-limited test run before committing to leasing a brick and mortar location.)
- Multiple artists set up individual booths at a public venue to form a market of vendors. (Picture a holiday craft market or farmers' market.)

BENEFITS

Characterized by their flexibility and adaptability, pop-up marketplaces offer inexpensive alternatives to opening a full-time gallery or shop. The temporary nature of pop-up shops creates a sense of urgency for consumers encouraging them to get out and check out the displays. The buzz generated around a pop-up can make the event lucrative for vendors, all while giving community members something to look forward to.



Makeshop pop-up shop display in Charleston, WV. (MESH, 2019)

WEST VIRGINIA ART POP-UPS

There are a number of arts-focused organizations in West Virginia. Here are a few that serve specific communities and/or counties.

The Handcrafted Cooperative (Morgantown)

thehandcraftedcooperative.com/

The Handcrafted Cooperative is a cooperative group of curated modern makers and antique/vintage vendors who host a seasonal retail market dedicated to goods created by the most talented independent makers in our area. The Handcrafted Cooperative organizes several outdoor markets each year held at the Morgantown farmers' market pavilion,



FROM OUR HANDS TO YOURS



Handmade Holiday (Wheeling) wheelingheritage.org/event/handmade-holiday-3/

Hosted by Wheeling Heritage, the Handmade Holiday is a pop-up holiday craft market that features unique and creative handmade goods. This marketplace of locally produced craft goods invites you to buy local, and shop small.

Mesh Makeshop (Charleston) meshfresh.org/makeshop

MESH, a creative design group in Charleston, offers a community space called Makeshop to encourage community collaboration by providing a free, creative space to bring ideas to life. The space is often used for art pop-up shops, presentations, and workshops designed to encourage the local community to create together in the space.



Short Story pop-ups (Rivesville) facebook.com/events/786548768442238/

Short Story Brewing hosts annual holiday pop-up shops each December featuring a selected local and/or regional artisan, live music, and special seasonal libations. The 2019 pop-up featured Kin Ship Goods, the Charleston-based apparel, accessories, and home goods company.



Makeshop, Charleston, WV. (Charleston Gazette-Mail, 2018)

WHERE TO START?

Think your community might benefit from a pop-up art market? Here are some suggestions on where to start.

GATHER YOUR TEAM

Start by identifying local players in your community: the artists, craftspeople, and other local entrepreneurs and business owners who might want to sell their work as pop-up vendors. Gauging their interest early on will help you scale your event appropriately to meet local vendor demand. You'll also want to reach out to local restaurants, businesses, parks, and other establishments who might be willing to host an event in their space or pitch in through some other means.

DO YOUR HOMEWORK

It's always a good idea to check with your city or other local officials to learn about any potential local ordinances or other rules that might apply to holding a pop-up market—particularly if you plan to hold your event in a public space. Also, learn from others. Try to attend planned pop-up events in other towns to widen your perspective and see what works in other places. Most groups are open to helping other communities follow in their example, so reach out to these groups to ask questions about what lessons they have learned in running their pop-up events.

SET THE PARAMETERS

Pop-ups offer a great deal of versatility and can be designed to cater to any community. But first, you'll want to set some basic ground rules for your pop-up, starting with the following topics:

- Is your market going to have a theme or target specific kinds of art and crafts? Some markets organize around a single medium (for example, a pottery pop-up sale featuring different ceramic artists), whereas others seek to have a diversity of artistic mediums represented among their vendors. Also, some pop-ups organize around a single theme such as holiday gifts or wedding inspirations, which they then curate their vendors around in order to focus the sales content and attract a certain target audience.
- Will this be a one-time event or a recurring series of markets? This is important to keep in mind when planning the initial event because it could evolve into a series of events or a permanent storefront in the future. If the goal is to create a long-term business out of the pop-up shop initiative, the branding used during marketing and on the physical products may need to be considered. A little upfront planning and investment could go a long way with branding down the road by providing a cohesive image.

Pop-up fundraisers: Some art pop-up shops raise funds for a dedicated cause and/or partner with a local arts organization or a local non-profit to reach a larger target audience. As a bonus for participating organizations, a small percentage of the sales and/or vendor fees could be donated in exchange for the partnership.

SELECTING VENDORS

Next, you'll need to make some key decisions concerning the vendors for your pop-up.

First, how many vendors will your event host? You'll need to find a venue that can accommodate all your vendors, though if you already have a space in mind, your space may dictate the maximum number of artists.

Assuming you're hosting a market with multiple vendors, how will vendors be reviewed and selected? For smaller markets, the process of selecting artisans may sort itself out naturally. However, larger markets often need a system for reviewing artists similar to a jury process. For example, the Handcrafted Cooperative markets in Morgantown are juried and curated, and only professional, creative entrepreneurs selling handmade, local food and vintage/antiques are accepted. The event organizers have a handbook for participants, which spells out the criteria by which prospective vendors will be reviewed.

In addition, some markets charge a vendor fee based on the amount of booth or display space they occupy.

Legal considerations for vendors

In West Virginia, all vendors must have a business license and be registered through the state tax department. There may be additional licenses or permits required depending on the city or town that you are holding the art pop-up shop or market. Reach out to the city finance department in your town to ensure that you and your vendors are compliant with local regulations. It is also important to collect six percent sales tax on all sales made within West Virginia and submit the payment to the West Virginia tax department. A sales tax account number will be required to submit this payment.

- Register for a West Virginia business license: onestop.wv.gov/b4wvpublic/default.aspx
- Register with the West Virginia State Tax department and submit sales tax payments: mytaxes.wvtax.gov/
- Keep in mind that if the event is to include food and beverage vendors, a call to the local health department should be made to determine requirements of these participants.
- Insurance is another important coverage to consider as a vendor. Contact your local insurance agent to determine available coverages for your temporary display. Out of state vendors may also be required to register as a transient vendor under West Virginia's tax regulations. For more information, please visit: tax.wv.gov/Documents/TSD/tsd317.pdf



CHOOSING A LOCATION

The next, and probably the most important, step in this process is determining a physical space to host the pop-up shop or market. Depending on the size of the intended exhibit, spaces need to be identified within the community that can comfortably accommodate the event. The format can vary substantially based on the needs and goals of the organizer.

Displays can range from one small table to a multi-tent art market. When determining the size of your pop-up shop or market, consider the size of the local community and how many people may be interested in attending.

See what's already available to you

Many pop-up shops are hosted within an existing shop or business's physical location. For example, an unused wall at a local café may be a great pop-up space for a collaborative painters' organization. A jewelry designer may opt for a table display at a local fashion boutique.

Larger-scale pop-up art markets may consider existing shopping complexes, vacant storefronts, or any local business with a large physical space. Schools and sports facilities may also offer a great space for a large pop-up art market.



The Handcrafted Cooperative in Morgantown, West Virginia, converts an existing farmers' market pavilion into a seasonal handmade goods market four times per year. The market features over forty vendors, including clay works, paintings, jewelry, apparel, and woodworking displays. (Handcrafted Cooperative, 2019)

When the appropriate size for a space is determined, reach out to business owners, commercial leasing agents, and/or community organizations that will help to identify available spaces for the event. Be prepared for the initial meeting with these entities with a solid pitch, including details about other organizations involved, how many vendors, and the duration of the event.

A budget is also a good thing to have in mind when meeting with potential space providers. In some cases, it may be possible to secure a space for free. However, a financial arrangement will most likely need to be made to secure the space. It is important to negotiate how this partnership will work and to put it in writing. Don't forget to pitch the benefit of additional income to be gained through collaboration for the space owner. For owners of vacant storefronts or retail spaces, the temporary rental is a prime

opportunity for revenue generation on a space that is not otherwise producing any.

After the terms are agreed upon, there are other details about the space that will need attention. For example, rental equipment will need to be coordinated for the displays, including tables, tents, signage, clothing displays, table covers, and any required utilities. Besides utilities, such as electricity, the displays could be left to the responsibility of the participating vendor or this could all be provided for a fee by the organizer. If the means are available, the organizer could provide pre-designed display spaces as part of the vendor's fee. This would increase the overall cost of the event but could be a value-added service to the vendor and make for a cohesive, well-organized exhibition overall. Contact local equipment rental dealers to discuss pricing and get quotes on a per display basis. Rental companies may also be interested in sponsoring the event which would help to reduce rental fees. The rental fee for the space and the rental equipment will need to be taken into consideration when determining the vendor's participation fee.

SCHEDULING YOUR POP-UP

Once a location is secured, the timing of the event is also very important. The time of year, the time of day, and the day of the week are all to be considered. The best time to hold the pop-up shop or market is when there is a high probability of foot traffic. Do your research on the accessibility around the location throughout the week or time of year.

Timing considerations

Consider parking fees: Is there ever free parking offered? This could be a selling point in the promotional strategy. Are there times when traffic is horrible, and access to the event could be hindered? Weekends seem like an obvious choice to host a pop-up shop or market. However, always check local event calendars to confirm what else is going on in the community. Other major events may harm the turnout or create unwanted traffic situations. Try to pick a date that will not conflict with other community-wide events, unless it could be used as an opportunity to collaborate with another organization to boost turnout.

Avoiding major holiday weekends is typically a safe bet unless the holiday weekend brings a lot of foot traffic to town. If the big Memorial Day parade triples the patrons of Main Street every year, then a pop-up shop or market may be a great idea to coordinate during this time. Also, Small Business Saturday—a popular marketing campaign to encourage consumers to shop at local establishments the Saturday following Black Friday—may be a great opportunity to partner with local shops. It may be difficult to sell a lot of products after major spending holidays, like Christmas, since budgets may be lean. Consider the time of the month when planning your event, the average consumer's budget is typically larger at the beginning of a month versus the end. Weather may also be a contributing factor for determining an appropriate time to host the event. Outside events may need a back-up plan or additional rental equipment in the event of inclement weather. Always plan for the unexpected. Include a clause in the vendor agreement in case the event must be canceled due to a major weather event or natural disaster.



Artist Sara Golden at a pop-up art show at Artistry on Main in Buckhannon, West Virginia. (My Buckhannon, 2019)

PROMOTING YOUR EVENT

Now that you have secured a venue and date, it is time to start promoting the event. Promotion of the event will need to mainly focus on the consumer but also vendors if it is a multi-vendor event. Social media outlets are the best way to reach the masses. Starting a social media campaign about one month prior to the event date should provide an appropriate amount of time to promote the event. Facebook offers a tool to create an online event listing which is a great way to get the word out and gauge the interest of attendees. Instagram and Twitter are also good outlets to get the word out about the event.

Also, consider posting the event listing on local event calendars, in local newspapers or newsletters, or through local organizations that have an established base of followers. A press release to the local newspaper may also be a great way to boost interest in the event. Posting flyers on community bulletin boards could also help get the word out to audiences that are not online or that do not use social media. Printing fees will be incurred and must be factored into the overall cost of the event. Always encourage other participating organizations and vendors to be advocates for the events as well. If volunteers are available, launching a street team to hand out flyers and promote the event while it is being held could also drum up some traffic.



McDaniel Pottery display at the Handcrafted Cooperative in Morgantown, West Virginia (Handcrafted Cooperative, 2019)

In conclusion, the flexibility behind the art pop-up shop or market concept makes it a potential fit for individual artists, arts organizations, or groups that want to bring art into a community and promote local commerce. Once the participating vendors, location, legal requirements, and dates are set, it can be a relatively easy, potentially profitable endeavor to introduce to your local area.



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