

Toolkits for the Arts

TOOKIT 5: HOST AN ART WALK

Art walks engage the entire community with the cooperation of businesses, neighborhood venues, local artists, residents, and even other vendors or entertainers. When done consistently, they provide an opportunity for community members to interact with and support their local businesses and creatives, as well as contribute to a robust commerce and arts scene in the town.

This toolkit is designed to:

- provide an overview of the logistics and benefits of art walks, and
- offer practical steps for businesses and artists participating in an art walk.

OTHER TOOLKIT TOPICS

This document is the fifth 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 www.tamarackfoundation.org.

WHY HOST AN ART WALK?

An art walk is an organized, often regularly occurring event, wherein multiple businesses, galleries, and other venues host artists and displays of their artwork, typically for purchase to the public. While similar to a pop-up shop, an important distinction is that an art walk is a tour—or walk—of an assortment of merchants and artisans coordinated at multiple venues in a given area. Often the events are accompanied by live music, additional entertainment, and other activities.

Art walks serve as unifying and community-building exhibitions that boost the visibility of artists in an area, stimulate local economic activity, and contribute to an enriched neighborhood culture overall. Art walks create a time to highlight partnering businesses and showcase new products or sales events. Emerging and seasoned artists alike enter the public sphere to share their inspirations and promote their work, and guests enjoy a creative way to experience their neighborhood and support the local economy.

WEST VIRGINIA ART WALKS

There are several art walk events in West Virginia. Here are a few that serve specific communities and/or counties.

Downtown Charleston ArtWalk (Charleston) artwalkcwv.com

The Downtown Charleston ArtWalk is a successful self-guided walking tour of Charleston's downtown businesses showcasing a variety of local art, including paintings, music, photography, and others. The Charleston Area Alliance organizes the event, which is held every third Thursday of the month from 5–8 p.m. for ten months of the year.



Main Street Morgantown Arts Walk (Morgantown) downtownmorgantown.com/events/arts-walk/

The Arts Walk in Morgantown is a seasonal event organized by Main Street Morgantown and Arts Monongahela. Described as a “creative-community-street party,” attendees can discover art created right in town while enjoying the wide variety of commerce that flourishes in downtown Morgantown.



WHERE TO START?

Think your local residents, businesses, and artists would like the opportunity to participate in an art walk? Here are some suggestions on where to start.

DO YOUR HOMEWORK

Who organizes an art walk?

An art walk can be an event coordinated by an existing organization, be the central function of its own organization, or held by an artist/business cooperative. (Learn more about forming an organization or cooperative in Toolkit 1: Create an Arts Organization and Toolkit 2: Form an Artist Cooperative). This toolkit assumes you have an interested group or organization in place. Your group should start off by determining who will take charge and spearhead project, what services will be provided, and the amount of funding necessary.

Who hosts an art walk?

Virtually any business with the appropriate display space can host one or more artists for an art walk. These can range from galleries, clothing boutiques and law firms, to cafes, bookstores, and restaurants. If indoor space is lacking, artists can use spots outside business buildings, such as sidewalk and lots, to set up booths and tents to draw people to their stop and the business beyond. The options are limited only by the space your town has available!

EXPLORE THE OPTIONS

Beyond the organizing entity, there are three essential players for any successful art walk: the artists, the businesses, and the patrons.

Find a group of interested businesses

If you're just starting out, try to find just a handful of participating businesses. You can typically find the contact information for businesses on their own hosted website, their social media pages, or their listing on a site such as Google Business or Yelp. Better yet, if you have a location narrowed down, such as downtown or surrounding a cultural asset in your town, have literature prepared to distribute to business owners in person and be available to discuss.

Find artists who operate locally or regionally

Individual artists can be found through local arts organizations, their personal websites, social media presence, gallery, or even their artwork being featured in various shops and restaurants. Send out a press release through local media and your own website or newsletter that calls for artists. Businesses could also already have an artist in mind!

Make a consistent schedule—and commit to it

Once you have your businesses and artists, nail down a schedule that everyone (or most) agree on. Reliable schedules encourage both attendance and participation.

Small steps first: Charleston's ArtWalk started with just four small businesses before growing to a large-scale, well-attended event that boasts a consistent 25–30 venues hosting a range of artists. As the event grew, they expanded to include such participants as schools, at-risk groups with art therapy programs, and demonstrations, transforming it into a truly community-building affair.

VISIT SOME ART WALKS YOURSELF!

Those interested in getting an art walk off the ground should make an effort to investigate art walks that go on in your general region. Look online, at brochures, or ask around to identify the organizing group for the art walk and be open with your interest and any questions you might have. As you explore the art walk (or their site, or speak to their organizers), take note of what you appreciated, were surprised by, thought was interesting, or thought could be improved or omitted. Did anything stand out—as particularly good or particularly troublesome? Consider these questions and how they might apply to your event:

- How did you find out about it? Word-of-mouth, social media, newspaper, newsletter, etc.?
- What is the recurring schedule? Do they adjust according to weather, season, other events going on?
- What types of media are featured? Is it restricted to visual arts or does it expand to include music, performing arts, or other creative products?
- What is the breadth of businesses and venues represented?
- How long does it last? For example, Saturday mornings from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. or Wednesday evenings from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.
- How formal or informal is the art walk? How involved is the registration process?
- Do businesses receive commission on art sales? If so, all or some?
- What services are provided by the organization(s), and what services are businesses or artists responsible for?
- What supplementary entertainment, such as live music, food vendors, activities, and so forth, are available? Are they located throughout the businesses or in a central location?
- Does the event take advantage of any existing cultural attractions in the area?



A storefront participating in Charleston's ArtWalk (Downtown Charleston ArtWalk, 2019)

MAKE A PLAN

Survey your participating businesses and artists

An art walk can be anything you want it to be; however, it's helpful to establish and follow some unifying requirements for participants to be part of the official event to ensure quality, fairness, and safety. As you grow, you can begin incorporating more voices, new ideas, and expanding the vision for your art walk. At first, it's best to ensure all participants are on the same page in terms of what they hope to put in and get out of the event.

What are the expectations of both parties, and how can they be reasonably accommodated? How inclusive are the "arts" going to be? Will you keep it low-key or make it more festive? Which businesses spaces will be most suitable for different types of art? Are businesses and artists responsible for partnering up themselves or will you give assignments?

Scheduling

What kind of schedule can most participants adhere to? Monthly, bimonthly, seasonally? Many popular art walks grow a following and draw a consistent crowd on a regular basis, and establishing consistency makes both attending and making arrangements for participants easier--meaning over time, you're likely to see increased turnout and expand both the number and variety of vendors and artisans involved.

Consistency is key: Charleston's ArtWalk occurs every third Thursday of the month, March through December, 5-8 p.m., rain, snow, or shine. This year-round stability makes the event a community mainstay and something that is prepared for and looked forward to every few weeks, giving ample opportunity to join in.

Require registration for both businesses and artists

Registration forms will formalize the process, obtain valuable information that will help you appropriately plan and advertise per event, and streamline any fee collection. You can make these as exhaustive or as simple as you want and distribute them either to just vendors or also artists. Registration for candidates also gives you more control over which entities are associated with the art walk, the quality and nature of the art featured, and other factors that may be important to you. If you go through an approval process, you can build up a pool of artists and venues that can be added to your site and contacted for participation.

Charge a fee for merchants to be part of the official art walk

A reasonable fee (which could be packaged into yearly, monthly, etc. options at varying rates) can be collected and funneled directly back into the art walk efforts for advertising, supplies, services, and any enhancement or maintenance that would require funds.

Will you assign artists to a venue or will you require businesses to find their own artists?

Not having these connections could be a barrier to entry, but if you facilitate open communication and create an accessible pool of interested artists and businesses, you can make it easy for them to find one another—especially if you expect them to pair themselves.

Create a map of the official art walk stops, including the address, business name, and, ideally, the artist(s) being hosted.

You can accomplish this with a custom Google Map, which can be interacted with conveniently on patrons' phones. You may also wish to do a simple map graphic with locations marked. Ensure the map is updated to accurately reflect participants for each event.

Consider hosting an evening reception as a central social hub during the art walk

This can help form connections among city residents as well as give them an opportunity to engage with all participating artists. The reception area can serve as a central hub, providing maps/brochures, sales guides, refreshments, music, activities, and anything else you think might entice the public or prove to be useful.

Will vendors collect a commission on artists' sales?

Because an art walk should be viewed as a mutually beneficial event for both the merchant and the artist, many art walks don't allow businesses to charge commission. However, you may want to leave the commission structure and sale schedule up to each business. This should be discussed amongst the participants.

Passport system

While entirely optional, some art walks find that employing a passport system helps add an interactive and engaging layer to tour stops, and encourages thorough participation. The "passport" can be anything you like, such as unique tokens or stamps. Morgantown ArtsWalk, for example, distributes collectible bookmarks.

Wayfinding: In addition to a map, an effective way for patrons to locate each of the stops on-the-ground is through a creative wayfinding system. Wayfinding markers make the exterior of the art walk stop stand out from the surrounding buildings and can be anything from tiki torches to chalk art—what Charleston ArtWalk uses.



A collection of wayfinding markers for Charleston's ArtWalk (Downtown Charleston ArtWalk, 2019)

WEBSITE ESSENTIALS

Your website should be easy to find with a descriptive, memorable domain name. You could also use a separate page on an existing organization site if you have one. Make sure businesses, artists, and visitors have everything they need to know about your event. Here are some recommendations on what you should include on your site:

Include registration forms for businesses and artists that can be submitted directly online

Consider adding a payment portal for convenience to both you and the vendors.

Make a list of official vendors and artists accepted into the art walk

Highlight which venues will be open for business and hosting an artist. Include a short description, address, photo, and a link to their site. Likewise, create a list of artists, complete with names, pictures, medium, example art, website, contact information, etc. This will serve several functions: residents can see who comprises the creative scene and businesses can see the artists available to match up with and book appropriately.

- For example, Art Walk Edmonds (AWE) in Edmonds, Washington makes this easy with their “Find an Artist” webpage. Once artists submit their application and get improved for AWE, they have an individual entry added to the site. The artists are organized by medium, should the venue have a preference, and their contact information makes them easily accessible to vendors seeking artists. The inverse can also be done! artwalkedmonds.com/find-an-artist

As said—make a map!

The map can be georeferenced with pins and accessible on a GPS app such as Google Maps, or it can be a simple graphic map--just make sure it's updated.

- Charleston's ArtWalk updates their map for each event since not all official vendors participate every month: artwalkcwv.com/map
- Corvallis Art Walk (Corvallis, Oregon): corvallisartswalk.com/caw-map

Include a route that people can take to contact you, offer to volunteer, sign up for the newsletter, or another inquiry.

Images of past art walks, art pieces, and demonstrations will help guest visualize what to expect.

REGISTRATION FORM SAMPLES

Business Participation Forms

- Name of participating gallery or business
- Address
- Contact Name
- Contact Information (phone number, email)
- Website
- Handicap accessibility/Any limitations
- Declare whether you are providing a special, sales event, or something of note
- Note whether they have an artist, and if so...
- Artist Name
- Artist Contact Information (phone number, email)
- Artist website
- Medium of work
- Description of show
- How long will the work be displayed (just the art walk night, that week, that month, etc.) and the dates the work will be displayed
- Musicians or performing artists with short description
- Ability to pay or mark whether they have or haven't paid yet
- Liability waiver
- Refer to
 - artwalkedmonds.com/artwalk-listing-form
 - elkhartartwalk.com/business-guidelines/

Example Artist Participation Form

- Name
- Contact information (phone number, email)
- Medium
- Link to website, album, social media page, etc.
- Alternatively, a way to upload files of representative art
- Short description of art
- Short artist bio
- *Business license if required
- Liability waiver
- Refer to:
 - artwalkedmonds.com/artist-application-form/
 - elkhartartwalk.com/artist-application/

This is just a sample of some of the information existing art walks collect from potential business and artist participants. Not all of these questions may be relevant for your event and you may decide to include items not listed here, but you can use these as a starting point.

PROMOTING YOUR ART WALK

As said, you need businesses, artists, and visitors. All parts of an art walk are made up of the public—promoting your event will help to attract all necessary components for a successful art walk!

Market the art walk as a promotional opportunity for businesses and artists alike—because it is!

Some of the benefits of participating in the art walk should include visibility to the public through features online, in circulations, press releases, and emails; signage; a platform for new product or service releases; an entry in an online database; and more. Green and seasoned artists alike can gain visibility and sales. Vendors can tap into an entirely new customer base. Encourage artists and businesses alike to cross-promote each other. As with the by-laws, it is good practice, though not required, to review articles of incorporation with an attorney.

Use social media

With social media being one of the primary ways residents get news on what's happening in their region, it's a good idea to use it extensively and reach a broad audience. Post features on artisans, businesses, art walk volunteers or staff. Having an active social media presence lets visitors know the event itself is active, making them more likely to engage with it. Create a Facebook event with pertinent details, images, and numerous occasions to "share," "like," and "invite" a wide audience!

Encourage participants to help promote

Many participating vendors and artists likely already have a decent customer or fan base. Ask that they reciprocate the advertising efforts by sharing information on the art walk with their respective crowds through such venues as social media/websites, flyers, posters, and their own newsletters. This will help you reach a wider audience (especially when you're first starting out).

- AWE provides an entire page with marketing tools for merchants, including postcards and email invitation templates: artwalkedmonds.com/marketing-tools

Create a logo

A logo should be easy to read, memorable, and representative of the participating businesses, artists, and the town as a whole. Consider updating the logo on occasion to keep the brand fresh.

Be known! The Downtown Charleston ArtWalk attributes much of its success to effective marketing. Here is a list of marketing avenues they have explored:

- All free publicity
- Street banners every month
- Speaking engagements
- Partnering with other regional events
- WV Public Radio
- Facebook events
- Other strategic social media use
- Website
- Posters
- Newspapers
- Local and cable television advertisements
- Rack cards to be distributed in hotels and WV interstate rest stops
- Cycle new logos
- (Salisbury 2019)

GUIDELINES SAMPLES

Guidelines for Participating Businesses or Venues

Businesses should develop guidelines to distribute to their artists that clearly lay out the specifics of being hosted in their space. Details covered should include:

- Type of art allowed (content and medium)
- Logistics of installing and display the art
- Duration of display
- Commission structure (if permitted)
- Hours of availability and required presence
- Commission structure; brokering
- Who is to bring refreshments, music, etc
- artwalkedmonds.com/tips-for-a-successful-art-walk
- elkhartartwalk.com/business-guidelines/
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Guidelines for Artists

Once artists know which business they will be displaying in, ensure they physically visit the venue well beforehand. This will give them the opportunity to meet with the owner, possibly the individual who invited them to participate, and whoever is assigned to tend to the business at the time of the art walk. Artists should discuss expectations and the logistics of setting up in the space.

- Where to display art
- When to bring and install the artwork
- How much art to bring/how much space is allotted
- What display accessories or tools are needed (tables, stands, easels, hammer, ladder, etc.)
- How long the art will be displayed
- artwalkedmonds.com/artist-tips-for-a-great-art-walk
- (Pullman Chamber Arts Commission, 2014)

CONCERNS

While providing refreshments at your event is a great way to attract and keep patrons, liability issues can arise if items are homemade. It's best to keep refreshments store-bought or from restaurants.

Artists selling their work may require a business license. Make sure artists do some research on what legal considerations they might need to take into account: avvo.com/legal-guides/ugc/artists-guide-to-starting-a-business

Exclusivity precludes some artists from selling their work outside a gallery they have an existing agreement with. Learn more about exclusivity in Toolkit 4: Organize a Studio Tour.

Art displays and demonstrations should always abide by the legal and safety restrictions of the business venue. Do some background research and discussion on which media may be unsafe to demonstrate or if certain merchant venues may be cause hazardous display situations.

KEY RESOURCES

Downtown Charleston ArtWalk is one of the most established art walks in the state. Their site, contacts, and events themselves would be an excellent first contact for exploring the art walk option. artwalkcwv.com

Art Walk Edmonds in Edmonds, Washington is on the other side of the country, but has a wealth of resources that can be immediately applied to your town's event. offers several grant programs for arts organizations. artwalkedmonds.com

Auburn Arts Commission in Auburn, Alabama has additional examples of guidelines, inventory lists, and agreements for artists and venues. auburnartscommission.com/artwalk/artwalk_library.html

El Segundo Art Walk in Los Angeles, California, has ideas for the different activities you might want to feature, ways to promote, as well as helpful FAQ, application, and informational sections. elsegundoartwalk.com

SOURCES:

- Art Walk Edmonds. 2019. Art Walk Edmonds. <https://www.artwalkedmonds.com/>
- Charleston Area Alliance Program. 2019. ArtWalk CWV. <https://www.artwalkcwv.com/>
- Downtown Morgantown. 2019. Arts Walk. <http://www.downtownmorgantown.com/events/arts-walk/>
- El Segundo Art Walk. 2019. El Segundo Art Walk. <https://elsegundoartwalk.com/>
- Pullman Chamber Arts Commission. 2014. Welcome Packet for Participating Artists. <https://pullmanchamber.com/>