Lunchtime Art!

A school-based community art experience.

—

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So you'd like to create a school community arts program?

If you are reading this you are most likely considering creating a school community arts program or may be in the early stages of planning one in your neighborhood school or other community gathering place. You're not alone! In the past decade, public art and creative community efforts have expanded by leaps and bounds into all corners of the United States: rural communities, urban neighborhoods, suburbia, and all places in between. Consider how to use this as an opportunity to build community relationships and arts advocacy, while adding to the cultural richness and arts engagement in your school or neighborhood.

This guide offers an introduction to the nuts and bolts of a community *Lunchtime Art!* program. In the following pages, you will find:

- several school community benefits
- an overview of material and site needs
- budgeting
- some potential funding strategies
- basic evaluation methods

This toolkit aims to show that community art is so much more than the product itself: the art-making process can aid in building arts advocacy and arts engagement for all.

What exactly is *Lunchtime Art!*

All students should have access to art, and *Lunchtime Art!* aims to provide just that. *Lunchtime Art!* is a free program that allows students, as well as faculty, and community volunteers to experience art making in a non-judgemental, relaxed setting within the nooks and crannies of their busy day, like lunchtime. It is for the pure joy of expressing oneself, and making and creating together.

Lunchtime Art! can be any type of art that can be engaged in by any student at any age for a short 20 minute block of time during their lunchtime recess. For example, this could be a drum circle, where students pop in and out to drum on quality or unusual materials. It could be a table, laden with coloring pages and crayons. It could be as complicated as sun

prints or sock puppets, or as simple as a dj dance session. It could be a directed origami project or a self directed collage offering.

Why *Lunchtime Art!*

Lunchtime Art! is a way for students to meaningfully play and experiment with art making. Lunchtime Art! Is fun! Listed are several benefits of undertaking a *Lunchtime Art*! project in your school community.

- *Lunchtime Art! provides a place for students to play with the process of making art.*
- *Lunchtime Art! allows students to make mistakes and try again without repercussion.*
- *Lunchtime Art! Allows students to explore unusual art making materials.*
- *Lunchtime Art! promotes an equal arts engagement opportunity for all.*
- *Lunchtime Art! promotes creative thinking.*
- *Lunchtime Art! is automatic arts advocacy for your school community.*

How to Begin

A good starting point is to connect with local neighborhood schools; find out what their overall relationship with the arts is at their school site.

- Is there a need for a particular arts genre that you might be able to connect with.
- Do they have a PTA or PTO group that you can connect with?
- Do they have strong parent engagement? How is their community volunteer outreach?
- Connect with the school Principal and gather information about what their needs or wants are for arts education and arts engagement at their school site..
- What is the process for becoming a volunteer or facilitator at the school site and within the district.
- What kind of resources might they be willing to share or donate.
- What kind of art projects do you want to offer? (Remember these will be a short roughly 20 minutes.)
- How many students can you expect to participate?

Forming A Committee

Early in the process, you'll want to form a small committee to oversee the project. To be truly community-based and maximize participation, *Lunchtime Art!* projects should represent, reflect, and engage the people at the school site and who live in your community. The scope and length of the project will dictate the size of the committee. As a rule of thumb, consider inviting four to six people.

Because *Lunchtime Art!* can be more participatory than other public art programs, brainstorm the major tasks for the project. These tasks will help underscore finding the right committee members for the project.

Some of these tasks may include:

- **Site Preparation**
- **Material Donations**
- **Community Partnerships**
- **Volunteer Management**
- **Publicity**

Carefully weigh who the potential project partners may be. It's tempting and easy for communities to rely on the STP (Same Ten People) for legwork, as we all know people who are organized, reliable, and get things done. However, creative projects can often attract new people to the table, such as college students or the newly retired, so take advantage of this opportunity. Think of this as a way to build new bridges between groups of people often not in regular contact with one another.

Potential Committee Members

Local artists or art enthusiasts. These could be art teachers, arts council members, quilters, knitters, musicians, theater-makers, wood workers, or poets.

School PTA or PTO members.

Small business owners. Look specifically for entrepreneurs living or working nearby. They provide financial knowledge and links to other business owners who may be willing to help sponsor the project.

Stakeholders in local non-profits, centers of education or faith-based communities. Consider organizations that would be good partners and groups that are typically under-represented in your community. Invite them to the table.

A representative from the district administration or local government. Expertise in district policy or local public processes (i.e. permits) is often very helpful in community-based projects.

A newly retired individual. These folks are often more community-oriented, have more disposable income, and more time to invest in local projects**.**

College students. They are the future of your community and can link your project to the local community for a broader level of involvement.

Tasks for the Committee

Once the committee is formed, here's a list of questions to explore. This isn't an exhaustive list, just one to get your conversation started.

- *What's the impetus for our program?*
- *What goals are we trying to accomplish?*
- *Are there vital community groups not represented in our committee?*
- *Are there more community partnerships we should explore?*
- *How will we create community involvement?*
- *What funding do we have? What will we need?*
- *What's our ideal timeline and schedule for the program?*

WINNING! How to Measure the Success of Your Project

It's *so* important to celebrate wins throughout the project. Capturing success and community impact can lead to more community support for future projects, so promote and celebrate every step of the way!

Once your committee establishes project goals, get specific about how you can accurately measure how well you're accomplishing these goals. Identifying how to measure school community impacts will ultimately help the committee design a more successful process and overall project, and will enable you to better communicate your successes during and after the completion of the project.

Use this common management strategy to identify a few **SMARTER** goals:

• **S**pecific
• **M**easureable
• **A**ctionable
• **R**esult-oriented
• **T**ime-bound
• **E**valuated
• **R**evised

This strategy can be used throughout the process to see how well the project unfolds.

Where will *Lunchtime Art!* be? Selecting a Site

The site of *Lunchtime Art!* will help dictate the budget of the installation. Look for a site that is available, and accessible.

A Few Questions to Consider When Selecting a Site:

Is this outside during lunch time, or held in an empty classroom, conference room, cafeteria, once a week/month?

Do they have a covered area outside? Do they have foldable tables and chairs that can be borrowed if needed? Is there a grassy area to sit and set up?

What permissions do we need?
Speaking with the principal of the school site is a must.

Who's our targeted audience and who's our actual audience?
Sometimes we misjudge whom we would like to participate in an art project with who *actually* participates.

What are the narratives, message, and cultural values we're hoping to communicate?
Again, as the committee speaks with students, teachers, parents, and administrators, the answers should emerge.

Who has access to the space at any one time?

Who will be responsible for site maintenance and cleanup?
For example, who removes litter? Who will be responsible for any borrowed materials, like tables and chairs? Will electricity, lighting or signage be necessary? These details should be worked out between the principal, maintenance, and the committee.

How long will the program run for and continue?

Could weather be a factor? If it is, what will happen?

To secure the site, you will need the permission from the principal and/or district. Often the principal will want to have a say in the schedule, scope, and process. It is best to sit down with the principal and develop a written agreement of what each involved party, such as, committee, and artist/s, will provide.

How do we involve the community?

Here you will find some possibilities for maximizing community engagement. If you're wanting to measure how an art program impacts your school community, each of these suggestions could be a *SMARTER* goal.

- Spread the word to potential participants. Visual Artists, Musicians, Dancers, Actors abound everywhere! Create a fun call-for-participation and distribute widely (in person and digitally) to your local and regional communities.

- Ask local artists to show special techniques and skills. Local art teachers may be thrilled to incorporate a community project into their curriculum.

- Encourage folks to clean out their closets and craft rooms, and donate to a great cause.

- Enable community members to help in the process. Each of these tasks could be an organized event.

  - Prepping the day of.

- Asking for donations of craft items, paper,, old crayons, legos, recyclables, drumming materials, etc.
- Creating signage.
- Site maintenance.
- Support during the program.

Documentation of the program.

Designing a strong, consistent, and comprehensive documentation strategy (print, digital, and social) will maximize your connections with your school site and local community, as well as highlight your program to a much wider audience. Below are questions for the committee to consider.

- What audiences are you trying to reach?
- Who in the committee is in charge of publicity?
- Who's documenting the project? How?
- What is your social media strategy?
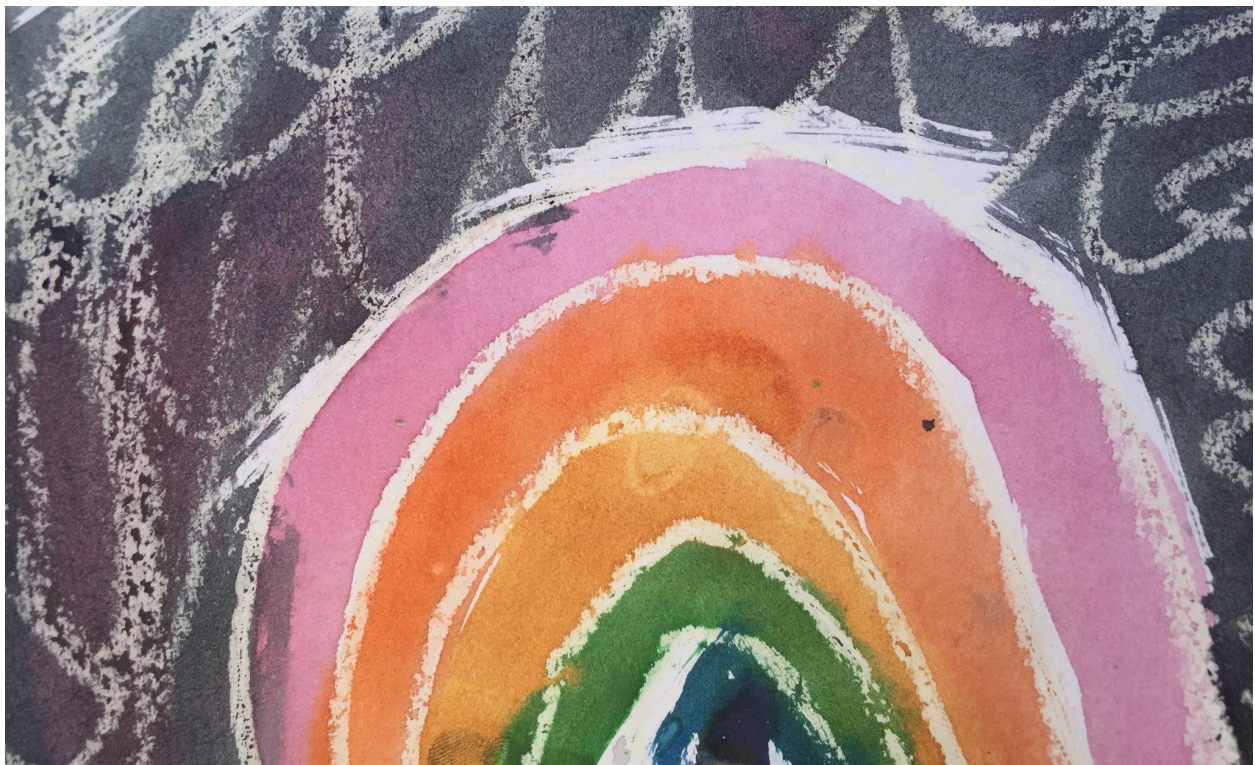
MOVING FROM PLANNING TO PRODUCTION

How do we fund this thing?

More often than not, money can be a barrier to creating a successful school art program. Fortunately, with the increased awareness of how school art programs add value to communities, making the case for funding has become easier. The Americans for the Arts website offers wonderful resources that demonstrate the economic impact arts and culture have on a local, regional and national level. A number of long-term and thorough reports can be found under the Research section of their website, americansforthearts.org.

Below are some conventional and more creative ways to fund your project.

- Parent Teacher Associations and Organizations
- Community foundation grants
- Local business sponsorships
- Grants from your local or state arts council
- Materials or equipment drive
- Crowdsourcing, online and/or locally
- Fundraisers
- Partnering with a local community organization, such as a healthcare facility, a retirement community, or an after-school organization

Budget and Expenses

A common concern in community art projects is money: specifically, how much, who's paying and where it's coming from. Many communities make the mistake of overcommitting to an underfunded program, which compromises the longevity and success of the project. Take note of how much you are able to spend and plan accordingly. Here are some tips for crafting a budget.

Budgeting for a program like this will largely depend on how long the program runs for. How much quality donated material can be procured. And, whether or not your program can utilize and be sustained with volunteers. This is why speaking with community stakeholders, such as PTA, the school principal, and local artisans beforehand can be helpful.

A significant portion of your budget should go towards paying an artist and materials when needed.

For example, a *Lunchtime Art!* program run at a Title 1 school in Pasadena, CA, ran for two years once a month for 9 months on a 200 dollar per year budget. Money was procured through the school's PTA and the program was run on a strictly volunteer basis, utilizing some supplies such as paper generously donated by the school and a local artist. The program caught the attention of the PTA's council district and was awarded an additional 100 dollars.

Approaching an Artist

Your committee may have specific artists in mind that you'd like to approach to organize your school community *Lunchtime Art!,* or facilitate for a day. There are several ways you can approach them. First, determine your project knowns; What do you know for sure? What the budget is or are you approaching them strictly on a volunteer basis? Who are the participants? The site? The length of time and when the program will run?

- Determine what you'd like the organizing artist to do. Will they design the program or project?
- Clearly communicate what the parameters are, and what areas your committee would like the artist to lead.

Celebrating Wins

Celebrating your wins as a committee and as a school community can create so much momentum for the *Lunchtime Art!* program and for your community as a whole. Get creative and get loud about it. Art matters!

Lunchtime Art! provides endless fun and creative promotional opportunities during the progam.

These may include:

- Photography sessions
- A time-lapse video
- Participant interview videos
- Artist interviews

Congratulations on creating your school community *Lunchtime Art!.* These programs can connect residents, highlight community assets, celebrate community history, create school community visions, and inspire school community action.