

# **Monumental Considerations: Addressing Problematic\* Artworks, Memorials, and Monuments Suggestions for Public Art Programs**

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\* Racist, Sexist, Injurious, Harmful, Inaccurate, etc.

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# INTRODUCTION

We began writing this document in the fall of 2020 concurrent with civil unrest across the United States to talk about that discord through a public art lens. We shared stories about the civic dialogue and protest around works of art, monuments, and memorials in our communities. As public art practitioners, we are inherently interested in various ways communities are reacting to or facilitating the conversations, removals, interventions, and destruction of the works. We are also concerned about the violence, emotional damage, and safety risks that can occur when these issues are left to fester without conversation or meaningful action.

We acknowledge the damage ignoring controversial works can manifest. Community members can feel silenced by not having a public platform to express their views about works. By not addressing these painful controversies, community members are forced to endure the glorification and commemoration of harmful people and events in public spaces that are theirs too. It is imperative that community leaders and public art advocates not be paralyzed by uncertainty or fear and take a proactive stance to lead the dialogue about these issues.

In the last several years, the responses to the content and context of artworks, monuments, and memorials were often a combination of peaceful protest and public hearings. Tragically, we also saw destruction, violence, and death.

We aspire to avoid or diffuse violence by promoting awareness, organizing authentic and inclusive conversations, and developing solutions and policies for these works based on conversations held within our communities. Additionally, we look to our

colleagues nationwide who are engaged in this process, learning from their experiences. We are passionate about the need for public art professionals to be forthright and assertive about addressing problematic artwork, including memorials, monuments and other works in their collections. This document is not a step-by-step guide to quickly manage a controversy. This complex subject does not have a one-size-fits-all solution. Every community must find its own way through these difficult conversations aligned with local administrative practices and community context. Many communities are also going through similar conversations about street and building names. Controversy and passionate voices are an intrinsic part of public life, and they can be transformed into productive and meaningful discourse with transparent and intentional procedures.

This document provides suggestions for internal and external practices. It offers questions and administrative frameworks to consider. Although the contributors agree on many suggestions in this resource, we have different points of view growing out of our individual professional practices and experiences in different communities. We have attempted to share a variety of perspectives in this document.



# SUGGESTIONS

## 1. Internal to the Public Art Program / Government Entity

### A. Contextual Assessments

**Questions to Explore: If what is presented on public land is an indication of what a community values, what does your collection say about your community? Does your collection represent your values? Whose values are represented? What projects need careful consideration and discussion?**

Public art administrators and many of our colleagues who work in the public realm are keenly aware that public art, memorials, monuments, and other objects have social, historical, and emotional contexts that need to be brought to the forefront of the conversation of the collection management conversation. Over the past few years, we have seen a range of community responses to objectionable and problematic works, from art commission reviews to the removal of monuments by groups of individuals. We strongly encourage public art programs to review their collection in conjunction with a process that engages a broad cross section of the public to identify problematic works and take proactive and transparent steps to communicate and make decisions about those works.

We can begin the examination of our collections by expanding a tool already used in our field: condition assessments. Public art programs may have a range of holdings in their collections; some programs consist of sculptures accumulated or inherited over time, while others have purposefully developed a collection showcasing a wide range of forms of artistic and cultural expression. To steward these collections, public art programs across the country have or aspire to have a collection management system that includes an up to date inventory of artworks and objects in their collection, instructions for the care of the collection, and a list of conservation and maintenance needs. These components of collection management only address physical conditions.

The recommendation is for public art programs and entities who own or oversee collections to develop a system for a content and context assessment of all artworks including portable works, monuments, memorials, and other objects such as historic markers.

This assessment prompts public art programs and organizations to:

- Be proactive about addressing problematic components of the collection to avoid managing decisions in a crisis environment.
- Engage with colleagues and the community to make decisions about what types of problems exist and how they shall be evaluated.
- Initiate and frame conversations about what actions to take to address problems identified through the review process.
- Demonstrate that actions are being taken to examine a collection and consider what is appropriate on public property for all members in the community.
- Create records about old, new, and ongoing conversations about problematic works in a collection.

“Best practices” for record keeping and caring for objects already exist, guiding how individual public art programs form and implement their management systems. Reviewing the content and context of the collection is a necessary component of collection management that must be added. Additional best practices will be developed by the field as we work through and evaluate how to manage this process.

In the meantime, below are some basic questions and suggestions to consider when developing this type of review:

### **1. *Why is this type of review needed?***

Public art administrators know what is placed on public land is construed as an indication of what a community values, or at least what powerful entities deemed appropriate for the site. Over the past few years, public artworks, monuments, and memorials have been the focal point of peaceful demonstrations, protests, and counter protests where their content, form, and meaning is questioned and challenged. Tragically, some of these demonstrations have ended in vandalism, violence, and even death. We need to lean into this situation to promote meaningful civic dialogue with broad participation, transparent methods to review these projects, and systems for identifying and taking action.

### **2. *When should assessments take place? How often?***

It is imperative that public art programs and other entities managing public art collections develop a framework for the review of their respective collections and then commence the reviews as soon as possible. This is especially true if there is a known crisis in your community, or one that is poised to happen soon. The purpose of acting quickly is to set the stage for informed and authentic conversations where thoughtful decision making replaces violence, abuse of power, and reactionary decisions that can happen during crisis mode.

These reviews are not one-time only and should be periodically incorporated into collections management policies. The context of objects in the collection and the appreciation (or not) of their content changes over time. Ideally, content and context is reviewed when condition assessments are made in an ongoing capacity.

### **3. *Who should participate in the reviews?***

Initial assessments will likely be completed by public art program staff. Professional staff can create briefing documents that outline key issues based upon a comprehensive historical overview of the artwork under discussion. After staff review, working groups can be established to consider the problems identified in the assessment. They follow the process identified by the public art program for addressing problematic works. When identifying historians, arts professionals, artists, and community leaders to participate in subsequent reviews and discussions, it is important to center diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Representation in review bodies is paramount. When setting those standards it would be advisable to have a review board that is not only diverse racially and ethnically, but also composed of people with different educations, ages, and life experiences. A room full of people representing a limited demographic may not see problems with the celebration of one historical figure, artwork, or

event. Different groups have different perspectives. Some may have a complicated, if not hostile, relationship with what or who is being commemorated, but you may not get that feedback if the review body is not diverse. Be prepared to have multiple separate conversations in order to form a full review of the context.

If your program doesn't already engage a diverse demographic, selecting a diverse, equitable and inclusive review body will prove difficult. Here is an opportunity to reflect on the privilege of your program and make changes to address a lack of diversity and inclusivity in decision making. Some of the steps to take include: learning about the importance of decolonizing art history, reading about white supremacy and privilege, and cultivating relationships with underrepresented community members.

Building an inclusive participatory practice will take time and is not without challenges, but ultimately will result in a meaningful and representative public collection.

#### **4. *What should reviews look for?***

Every public art program or entity that owns artwork, monuments, and memorials will need to identify the types of issues to be addressed by the assessment. Currently, projects that embody or celebrate racism, colonialism, sexism, or that commemorate individuals affiliated with slavery, racism, sexism, and colonialism are the most problematic in many places across the country.

Additionally, information sometimes emerges regarding personal details about the maker or artist which might create concern within the community as to the continued appropriateness of the artwork. If it becomes known that the maker or artist engaged in morally questionable behavior in his/her/their personal life, some might wish to remove those projects so as not to appear to condone the morally questionable behavior. Communities will need to develop their own set of standards to apply in these situations.

In addition to problematic content, the lack of artist diversity in the collection can also be researched. A simple demographic review of the artists represented in a collection can identify immediate issues. It is unacceptable if a public art collection does not reflect the diversity of the community it serves. While it may be challenging to convince those who work within the institution of the necessity to reflect the community in its collection, failure to do so will result in a lack of community support.

#### **5. *How should problems be addressed?***

The assessments will identify issues found within the collection. Document them, the process used, and materials and resources discovered along the way. But the assessments are only the beginning. The rest of this document identifies strategies for addressing problematic works and offers examples from specific places. Although some of the possible solutions will be similar across the country, including deaccessioning, adding educational information, and even taking no action, it is important to recognize that a one-size-fits-all approach is not possible nor recommended. Even though it may be challenging and time consuming, a crucial step in this process is to engage in a transparent process with diverse community members to solicit ideas for addressing problematic works.

## **B. Policies and Procedures for Removal of Artworks**

**Questions to explore: Does your program have systems in place for inclusive conversations with diverse members of your community about what is displayed on public property? Have you considered how to address existing and future permanent works in addition to temporary art, monuments, and memorials? Does your program need to change anything about the way artworks are brought into the collection?**

Examine policies and procedures to see what processes and tools are already in place and what needs to be revised or initiated. Create new policies and procedures to guide public art administrators, art commissions, and artwork owners through the decision making process. Create or rewrite deaccession and other policies that allow for the disposition of art when needed. Engage community members in the review of policies and procedures.

We recognize that arts programs are often called upon to manage the process of removing, disposing of, and sometimes, replacing challenging artworks, monuments, and memorials. While having policies and procedures in place does not necessarily preclude a difficult process to address problematic situations, they do provide a framework from which to start discussions and move forward. These policies are not immutable and can and should be revised as necessary to accommodate a range of possible outcomes.

### **Deaccession Policies**

One key tool in collection management is a policy for the review and deaccession of city (publicly)-owned works of art, and by extension, monuments, memorials, and other statuary over which the public jurisdiction has stewardship. A deaccession policy establishes procedures for periodic review and evaluation of an artwork collection, including both permanently-sited and portable works. Such a policy may be accompanied by legislation that

covers the disposition of "surplus" artworks. If no such policy exists, consider establishing one. The policy should be prefaced with a statement that supports the arts agency's responsibility to: acquire artworks for public benefit; to review the current condition and conservation needs of individual artworks and the collection as a whole; and to deaccession, remove, and dispose of artwork as deemed necessary.

Deaccessioning is a process that allows for the removal of an artwork from a collection using several available methods of disposition. It is one tool of collection management and should be applied judiciously. Again, it is important to state clearly that it is the arts agency and its designees making the determination that an artwork is no longer useful to the collection and in some cases is harmful to community well-being. Such determination may result in deaccession, relocation, and/or removal. Deaccession is an administrative procedure, disposition is the physical removal of the artwork through sale, trade, or destruction, and should occur through an approved method that is outlined in the deaccession policy.

A deaccession policy might state how many years after acquisition the removal of an artwork might be considered. There may be conservation issues or deteriorating conditions that necessitate an artwork's removal from a collection. However, it is quite possible that the reasons given for the recent removals of monuments and statues (or portable artworks with questionable imagery) are not codified



in many current, and otherwise solid deaccession and collection management policies. It would be useful to include, or add, a provision for the immediate evaluation for deaccession; this may require a revision of a standing deaccession or collection management policy, and rely on reasons beyond conservation and current condition of the artwork. It is important to establish what the review criteria is for deaccession. The criteria should include whether an artwork reflects racist values.

Typically, a deaccession policy would outline:

- 1. Which artworks are eligible for deaccession** - for objects that are defined as artworks (however you choose to do that) it may be useful to list acquisition methods that qualify the artworks to be considered for deaccession. You might list not only artworks that were acquired by donation, purchase or commissioning by the arts organization, but also those the agency has been tasked to steward (often the case for historic bronzes and statuary). Other items—such as plaques and text memorials—may not have to go through the same deaccession process as an artwork and you may be able to defer to other methods of removing surplus material.
- 2. An evaluation and review schedule** - including a public engagement process if necessary. Not all deaccessions will warrant an extensive community involvement.
- 3. Reasons for which you would deaccession an artwork** - typically, this might include theft or other loss, condition, faulty workmanship, site alteration, disassociation under the Visual Artists Right Act (VARA). This is where one might consider adding a clause that accommodates content considered harmful or reasonably objectionable (over a period of time) to a segment of, or an entire, community. Harmful, in this case could mean something that devalues individuals or groups, or causes those to feel unwelcome, or is a reminder of past mistreatment.
- 4. Steps to take** - assess the artwork using review criteria; document original acquisition method, issues, condition; contact the artist if applicable; engage community; and present to advisory panels or standing review committees. Contacting the artist may be necessitated by contractual clauses, by laws such as VARA, or by acceptable disposition methods.
- 5. What to do with the artwork** - determine whether sale, trade, storage, relocation, or destruction are appropriate.
- 6. Who is designated to make the final decision** - clearly articulate whether it is a standing committee, or one convened specifically for the review of gifts and deaccessions, which should include community members. The advantage of a standing committee is that its members can develop familiarity with rules and policies and can review successive artworks with historic knowledge of earlier actions. Such a standing committee however, should be inclusive of the diversity of the community. If it is not, then new guidelines and designated seats for different sectors of the community should be designated.

## **Disposition and Other Considerations**

Policies pertaining artwork should be consistent across various departments and take into account other practices, policies, and laws that may apply. A decision to sell or trade an artwork might be subject to policies that govern how historically registered artworks or surplus city assets can be disposed of. States may prohibit the gifting of public funds or property; by extension, this can preclude a public agency's returning an unwanted artwork to its creator, or the donors, without receiving compensation. Must the jurisdiction obtain fair market value? Does this require you to attempt to recoup the value (or original purchase/commission price) of the artwork or prevent you from gifting it to a non-profit museum or destroying it? And if you can't dispose of the work, must you store it forever? Can you make the determination that an unwanted artwork has no value by virtue of its inability to be displayed? Ideally, you could revise your policy to allow for a sudden removal, and preclude the need to obtain market value, or store an artwork in perpetuity. Keep in mind, many artworks undergoing deaccession were made by artists who are still living; if you are negotiating a trade for a more suitable artwork, you will most certainly need to engage the original artist in a conversation.

Before making a decision to remove, relocate, or destroy an artwork, a determination must be made as to whether an artwork is protected under VARA. The date of the artwork's creation and waivers—whether by contractual clauses or stand-alone waiver—may obviate this protection. Many of the monuments currently being removed were created long before VARA went into effect (1991). Be mindful to check state law as well - for example, the California Arts Preservation Act is effective from 1987, predating VARA. Several other states have parallel regulations as well.<sup>1</sup>

Many of the provisions of deaccession policies are technical, and are often based on museum policies and standards. In an effort to move away from museum-style policies and towards more public engagement, a city should consider more equitable practices of engaging community members in the review of city policies. It can be beneficial to include community members in discussions about the disposition, removal, or replacement of controversial artworks, monuments, and memorials.

<sup>1</sup> CA (California Art Preservation Act Cal. Civ. Code Ch. 3 § 987-89); CT (Art Preservation and Artists' Rights CT. Gen Stat § 42-116t); GA (Art in State Buildings GA Code § 8-5-7) (only applies to public art in state buildings and no protection for destruction/removal); LA (Artists' Authorship Rights Act LA Rev Stat § 51:2151-56); ME (Preservation of Works of Art 27 M.R.S. § 303); MA (Art Preservation Act ALM GL Ch. 231, §85S); MT (Art for State Buildings Mont. Code § 22-2-407) (provides only a right of authorship for state buildings); NE (Neb. Rev. Stat. § 82-328) (all state-owned commissions strip the artist of any rights at all); NV (Works of Art Nev. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 597.730); NJ (Artists' Rights Act N.J. Stat. § 2A:24A) (does not include any protection for destruction/removal – only the right to attribution); NM (Fine Art in Public Buildings N.M. Stat. Ann. § 13-4B-3); NY (Artists' Authorship Rights Act N.Y. Arts & Cult. Aff. Law § 14.03); PA (Fine Arts Preservation Act 73 Pa. Stat. § 2108, 73 Pa. Stat. § 2101); RI (Works of Art – Artists' Rights 5 R.I. Gen. Laws § 5-62-6, Art in Public Places – Artists' Rights 42 R.I. Gen. Laws § 42-75.2-8); SD (State Arts Council S.D. Codified Laws § 1-22-16); UT (Percent for Art Act Utah Code Ann. § 9-6-409); WI (Fine Arts in State Buildings Wis. Stat. § 41.57); WY (Works of Art in Public Buildings Wyo. Stat. § 16-6-804); PR (Intellectual Property 31 L.P.R.A. § 1401j – 01t)

Many jurisdictions use the public hearing as a way to solicit public comment. These can provide interesting insights - for example, as Confederate monuments were being removed throughout the country, Congress held hearings broadcast on C-Span. One of the more impassioned pleas to remove a statue of Robert E. Lee came from a namesake descendant, who condemned what his ancestor represented. Public officials themselves have had the courage to question those symbols that reflect an outmoded adherence to white supremacy.<sup>2</sup> In addition to public hearings, it may be more meaningful to engage in direct conversation with communities for their thoughts not only about the removal of artwork, but for proposals for the contextualizing of harmful history and representing alternative stories (see below for more ideas).

Art commissions and agencies should also be prepared for situations in which the opposite can happen as well, with members of the public voicing support for work that your agency or community leaders have determined should be removed or relocated. It is imperative to center the voices of those whose histories are not reflected or are erased to establish a protocol that will not result in a public engagement process that is viewed as being meaningless.

“Public Art and its selection processes, like our society and government, are broken because of the same inequalities that exist due to racism, classism and sexism. Administrators of this document decided to have a conversation on how we grapple with the issues that present several challenges: lack of diversity in collections, lack of inclusiveness in the selection process, Black Lives Matter Protest Art, deaccessioning of Confederate, racist and other exclusionary monuments in collections.

Art is a reflection of a society’s culture and can be used as a standard of culture in a way that can be deceptive. If no one suggests diverse work, certain artists become invisible and the lack of minority artwork becomes normalized. So we find ourselves with many Collections of Art that reflect the normalization of White Supremacist Culture, excluding an equitable distribution of artworks for the public to see and with which to find inspiration. Some city, county or state Public Art Collections can’t or won’t change for various reasons outside the control of Collection Managers. However for the manager that can or must affect change we wanted to create a tool that can be of use.” - Kerry Kennedy

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/23/opinion/mitch-landrieus-speech-transcript.html>

## **C. Develop Cross Departmental Teams**

Public art staff should not, and really can't, be the only department charged with managing a collection and working through the decision-making about potentially and actively controversial works.

Because so much of this discussion centers on monuments that are statuary and are therefore considered the purview of arts agencies or organizations to steward, those departments or entities are often tasked with not only the disposition of the artwork, but also managing the public process surrounding the removal and possible replacement.

Arts agencies are often understaffed and under resourced. They frequently manage artworks that sit on another department's property - the art may be installed on department of transportation land if in the right of way, or in a park, or in front of a municipal institution or facility. Enlist the agencies responsible for the property management for assistance and partnership in the process, whether it be to share mailing or email distribution lists to reach out to communities to attend meetings, to provide meeting spaces, to provide communications staff to facilitate the meetings and frame the meetings as jointly hosted. This takes pressure off the arts agency to be the lone voice in responding to comments that could turn hostile or at the very least, become emotionally charged. If possible, try to allocate funds to engage a professional facilitator to mediate between the differing views and desires of the public.

It can be useful to have partners in decision making. Nurturing a collaboration can lead to potential resource sharing, which can help to fund the re-contextualization of a problematic monument, or the replacement project.

Similar to the Listening and Thinking Groups described below, the cross-departmental teams can be ongoing standing groups.

## **D. Identify Staff**

Public art programs need to identify the staff who will manage the work of the contextual review and policy development, and the day-to-day work of facilitating the community conversations. Agencies need to have an action plan in place for staff roles in the midst of controversies. Once projects become controversial, public art directors will most likely need to be relieved of other project management work to fully focus on communications, listening, and strategizing.

If staff are not available or skilled at managing the process during controversies, or if a neutral party would bring an unbiased perspective to the conversations, it can benefit agencies and public art programs to hire skilled facilitators or mediators to ensure that conversations are focused, structured, and well managed. Institutions or arts agencies may wish to create a position for a Racial Equity Program Director who can assist with issues arising in the public art program and across other agencies.

## **E. Maintain Relationships with Mayors, Town Managers, Councilmembers, Community Leaders, and Other Stakeholders**

One benefit of a good relationship between community leadership and the public art program may be the ability for the public art program to guide responses to controversial works. For example, avoiding a unilateral and rushed decision to replace one bronze figure with another bronze figure, when a more nuanced and thoughtful community process of decision making is needed.

As with developing cross-departmental teams, it can be effective to have a multi-disciplinary team to provide a united front when addressing community controversies. Cultivating a trusted relationship with other officials and departments will provide the foundation for building support and collaboration when faced with complicated controversies.

Further, maintaining relationships with leaders and other stakeholders can elevate the role and respect for the perspective and counsel offered by knowledgeable public art administrators. Being in a position of taking proactive actions and/or providing thoughtful solutions, can put a public art program in the position of trusted advisor, rather than reactive administrator or defacto scapegoat.

## **F. Follow Procedures, and Be Open to Changes**

There may be a temptation to create new methods for artist selection or review based on a singular controversy. Although there may be room for improvement, if a program has well established and equitable ways of managing these processes, stick to them. Making up new procedures in the short term could open the city/public art program to legal challenges or community mistrust in the long term. That said, it is wise to consider distinguishing processes and procedures from legislation or ordinances in a way that allows the legislation or ordinances to be evergreen, leaving room to be nimble in revising and modifying processes and procedures as a program evolves. Naturally, challenges and controversies will create a need to reconsider and/or reposition policies and procedures in order to avoid similar future challenges or make those policies and procedures more equitable.

## **G. Funding Sources for Conversations**

In addition to reconsidering the scope of what funding can be used for to include issues such as maintenance and conservation, and general administration of public art programs, ongoing community engagement is a part of the process that should not be forgotten nor its value underestimated. Establishing and maintaining policies, procedures, and standards will always be a work-in-progress and thus require resources in order to cultivate and maintain community relationships and discourse. Many of these conversations could be the result of interdepartmental/interdisciplinary efforts and thus not the sole responsibility of a public art program to fund, given its limited resources. Community engagement to address issues including questions and concerns around systemic inequity/injustice in public spaces might be effectively managed and organized by public art professionals, but increasing the number of stakeholders in such dialogue will be crucial to its sustainability over time. To this end, developing a cooperative approach to these conversations might be effective in drawing funding from multiple sources/departments.

## 2. External to the Public Art Program / Government Entity (Working with Communities)

### A. Develop and Encourage Listening and Thinking Groups

As this document encourages a proactive position for reviewing and making decisions about problematic works, don't wait for a controversy to create a group that will provide feedback, guidance, and ideas about how to manage problematic works. A standing group charged with participating in contextual assessments, recommendations for outcomes of problematic works, and participating in conversations with community members will be an ongoing benefit to a public art program.

Be intentional about diversity in composition of the groups, including the points of view represented. Be transparent about group purposes and working methods and how members were nominated and selected. Respect people's time by paying them a stipend for their participation.

- Chicago Monument Project launched in 2021 with a mission to "confront the ways in which that history has and has not been memorialized, and develop a framework for marking public space that elevates new ways to memorialize Chicago's history." <https://chicagomonuments.org/about>.
- New York City has two recent examples of different and related proactive groups. The first is New York City's Mayoral Advisory Commission on Art, Monuments, and Markers: [www1.nyc.gov/site/monuments/index.page](http://www1.nyc.gov/site/monuments/index.page). The second, and related example, is Beyond Sims: The Committee to Empower Voices for Healing and Equity, which formed in response to the Mayoal Commission to put community voices at the forefront of the future of the site. [www.facebook.com/VoicesForHealingAndEquity/](https://www.facebook.com/VoicesForHealingAndEquity/)

Public art programs and agencies should encourage community conversations by individuals and groups. In this grass-roots approach, the agency and public art programs listen to, but do not direct the conversations.

Establishing a network of cultural liaisons with various communities is a productive way to run your program and will help facilitate the conversations. Each community would recommend their own representatives. The conversation would not be limited to those representatives, but they could help publicize and bring in others from the community to engage in dialogue.

In addition, it may be helpful to public art programs, art commissions, listening and thinking groups, and community members to have outside perspectives and expertise on the content or context of problematic works. Inviting historians, artists, educators, and others with equity and intention to share information that helps broaden the access to impacts of the work will result in a more informed conversation and review process.

**"We have to ask ourselves whose stories and histories are given public space and resources and whose are not? We need to make sure that resources are centered on those who have been left out." - Kristin Calhoun**

## **B. Create New Frameworks for Conversations**

Whether conversations about works in a collection are ongoing or planned in the midst of a controversy, public art staff will be engaged in the necessary and difficult conversations regarding public artworks, monuments, and memorials.

We need to invent new, more inclusive ways to engage people and encourage diverse participation, centering the conversation beyond those who serve on art commissions and those who regularly attend public meetings. The conversations and communication systems need to be created and/or revised with equity in mind, and must take into consideration how conflicting opinions are managed when assessing the work and the possible outcomes for the work.

**1. Designed for Participation:** Staff needs resources to create the frameworks to engage with the community in authentic ways. Cross-departmental teams (described above) and public art staff should evaluate current meeting and community engagement methods and create new ones to increase participation. Transportation, accessible locations, translation and interpretation, child care, and time and duration of meetings can be barriers to participation. Pay stipends for participation on committees and working groups to acknowledge people's time, wisdom, and experience have value. There is implicit bias when only volunteers are able to participate. There may need to be multiple types of meetings, hearings, and feedback strategies created to ensure engagement. Creating these frameworks in advance of controversies when they can be tested and evaluated for success is beneficial. Digital platforms must also be an integral component of community participation.

**2. Training:** Staff needs to be trained in communication to develop skills of listening and recording public commentary to adequately capture community intent. As it is difficult to conduct a meeting, listen to comments, and record them at the same time, either the meetings should be recorded or additional staff resources for note-taking should be provided. When it is not possible or desirable for public art staff to lead conversations, other trained facilitators need to be hired. This is essential to yield a positive and productive outcome.

**3. Involve Community Members in Decisions about Engagement Strategies:** While some public art programs must adhere to the rules and required processes for public hearings and public meetings, other opportunities can be created to engage communities and get feedback. Invite community members or community liaisons to work with the public art program staff to share ideas about the format, timing, and frequency of engagement strategies. Digital platforms can expand opportunities for community voices and must be implemented whenever possible.

## C. Time

It is difficult to implement a thoughtful process during a crisis. This can be alleviated by creating a process for content and contextual assessments as an ongoing part of collection management. Build in ample time for conversations, reflection, presenting options, and responding along the way for every part of the process. In between decision points, present resources or questions for community members and stakeholders to consider. Holding the line on insisting that all decisions emerge from a process that values carefully considering all options will result in more sustainable policies and reduce the need to vacillate on choices and efforts. Measured responses help to alleviate the possibility of reactive choices that later need to be tempered or reversed.

## D. Healing Period

Over the past year, the colleagues who contributed to this resource have seen a common response to problematic works: replace it immediately. While a replacement may be exactly what many community members ultimately want and need, it would be wise to take the time to make this a well considered decision as opposed to a quick solution. Engage community members to see if, how, and when a healing period is needed after the removal of a controversial project. It may be most appropriate to have a healing period before any decisions about a future work are made.

Activities, if any, that occur during the healing period, should be planned by and for community members, specifically community members who have been injured by the problematic work. Although public art program staff and others may be invited by community members to participate in the process, it is important for them to not “take over” and make unilateral decisions about the healing period—and ideally before any decisions about new artwork or projects are considered.

“Following the evaluation of a community’s memorials, monuments and public art, and before contemplating commissioning any replacements for works that are to be, or have been removed, it may be beneficial for a community to engage in a period of experimentation. Artists should be provided with the opportunity to respond to the findings of the process undertaken to remove offensive or objectionable works with a series of temporary artworks. Public symposia to discuss the varied responses is another way to include the community and engage them in the process of defining a new paradigm for new monuments. Funding may be available for this period or experimentation from foundations that support public art.” - Jill Manton

“Some circumstances may cause so much community distress that immediate short term interventions may help focus the issues at hand and present some of the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead. Temporary fencing can offer surfaces for community expressions while protecting the contested artwork from vandalism. Video projections offer an ideal form for new visions and have been shown to galvanize communities with their visual strength and narrative capacities. Public art staff can think through implementation strategies for these, and additional interventions, and work with other offices and departments to be ready on quick notice to protect artworks and memorials on a temporary basis until permanent solutions are adopted.” - Marc Pally



## E. Sparking Imagination and Exploring Options

Spend time working with artists, community members, elected officials, and department staff to learn about different public art project types, including but not limited to a range of monuments and memorials. A first reaction to a problematic work is to replace it with a similar type of project with different content, one bronze for another. New ideas may arise when examples of what is possible are explored. Consider different materials that can be used or alternative manners in which memories can be preserved. Holding space for ideas can be much more powerful than hastily generated replacements derived from choices that determined the previous monument.

Engaging artists in this work, potentially using augmented reality and other digital tools to help people imagine what projects will look like in person, can provide fresh perspectives and a buffer between the community and the public art program.

“With trust, artists are great problem-solvers and are capable of finding solutions in ways that are unexpected, untraditional, and sometimes uncomfortable. Allow space to explore those perspectives. Consider taking advantage of those skills, not only as the artifact of a selection process but throughout all the practices suggested in this document.” - Kendal Henry

**Consider moving away from monuments to individuals**, especially individuals who are still living. Some public art programs require that ten years pass after the death of the individual or event has occurred in order to be commemorated with permanent art, monuments, or memorials. Consider monuments to ideals and communities as opposed to individuals.

**Consider temporary works of art, monuments, or memorials** as a strategy to engage a wider range of contributions and alleviate the intensity around making a hasty decision to replace a removed work. Rotating temporary work can make clear the principles and aspirations of a community. They may lay the groundwork for the future—temporary or permanent—monuments and memorials to be commissioned.

**Consider options for caring for spontaneous and unsanctioned artworks created** by community members in response to current events. These projects are often appropriately temporary, providing an opportunity to broaden conversations about their care and longevity with community organizations, other agencies, property owners, and individuals.

**Consider alternative means of telling histories** that have been missing from the conventional histories of the dominant culture - document, record and share stories told by a range of people whose experiences contribute to the development of a community but which may be concealed by a dominant culture narrative.



# ACTION STEPS

The goal of this document is to provide a wide range of perspectives and options for inquiry and action. The difficult conversations need to happen. These issues are too divisive and volatile to be ignored or postponed. That said, they are also complex and even when a sense of urgency exists to engage in dialogue, the steps to making a productive conversation happen can be daunting.

To that end, and in conclusion, we have developed a list of clear actions that can help scaffold the conversation and drive the creation of guidelines, policies, and procedures which provide clear and consistent methods for the treatment of problematic artworks, memorials, and monuments.

1. Identify the issue/concern/controversy that needs to be addressed. This does not have to be a specific problematic monument or memorial; it could be that an overall collection assessment needs to be implemented.
2. Outline an approach to address your issue. Identify stakeholders and participants, frame goals, outcomes and measures of success, develop a timeline - and take steps to implementation. Involve the community throughout the process. Ensure that diverse voices are represented.
3. Create effective, thoughtful, and nimble policies and procedures which can be consistently applied.
4. Develop written documents including but not limited to resource guides and contracts to realize the above.
5. Enlist the support and collaboration of others within the governmental structure and community to activate and advocate for the program and program choices.
6. Seek out resources and information about the work of peers locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally. Nonprofit organizations and foundations that have committed to this effort may offer financial and other support. The city of Chicago has recently formed a project, with a broad-based advisory committee, to review the city's monuments and recommend solutions (see Resources).

Finally, and perhaps most importantly: no community is entirely alone. We must understand the larger context for these challenges and controversies. While the specifics of each community's challenges may vary, the methods and strategies for facilitating meaningful discourse and effective problem-solving can be broadly applicable. By using the ideas and strategies described in this document, you will find your own path and create your own dialogue for your particular community's needs. Through this process, know that you are not alone and that there is a network of thoughtful, caring, and knowledgeable professionals who are dedicated to providing support, guidance, and suggestions for anyone who wishes to reach out.



# RESOURCES

Descriptions are excerpts from the resource's website

## **Chicago Monuments Project**

<https://chicagomonuments.org/>

Monuments and memorials have become a focal point for conversation, protest, and activism in the city of Chicago. In response, the city has created a committee to review the city's collection of monuments and recommend solutions.

This project outlines the following goals: cataloging monuments and public art on city or park district property, appointing an advisory committee to identify pieces that need attention, recommending new monuments or art commissions, developing a framework for public engagement and dialog about Chicago's history.

## **Community Remembrance Project**

by the Equal Justice Initiative

<https://eji.org/projects/community-remembrance-project/>

EJI's Community Remembrance Project partners with community coalitions to memorialize documented victims of racial violence throughout history and foster meaningful dialogue about race and justice today.

## **Confederate Monument Interpretation Guide Toolkit**

By the Atlanta History Center

<https://www.atlantahistorycenter.com/learning-and-research/projects-initiatives/confederate-monument-interpretation-guide/resources/>

In 2016, Atlanta History Center published the first iteration of this online toolkit, which was designed to help communities address Confederate monuments in their midst. Over time, this toolkit has been expanded to include case studies, a research guide, and other resources (including an extensive reading list) for fostering community conversations. The goal of this toolkit is to inform productive, inclusive community discussions. Through these conversations, communities can decide the best course of action for the future of public monuments, street names, and other historical references. Studying these public historical references uncovers stories from the past that provoke discussions about who should be honored in our communities and why.

## **Controversial Monuments and Memorials**

A Guide for Community Leaders

Edited by David B. Allison, 2018 published by Rowman & Littlefield

<https://rowman.com/ISBN/9781538113738/Controversial-Monuments-and-Memorials-A-Guide-for-Community-Leaders>

Out of the chaos and pain of Charlottesville, museum professionals, public historians, and community leaders must move quickly to face the challenges of competing historical memory, claims of heritage desecration and the ongoing scourge of racism. This book takes on the tough issues that communities across America—and analogous locales overseas—must face as white supremacy, political quagmires and visions of reconciliation with the past collide.

## **Equal Justice Initiative**

<https://eji.org/projects/community-remembrance-project/>

Collaborates with communities to memorialize documented victims of racial violence and foster meaningful dialogue about race and justice.

## **Mayoral Advisory Commission on City Art, Monuments, and Markers, New York City**

<https://www1.nyc.gov/site/monuments/index.page>

Announced in September 2017, the Mayoral Advisory Commission on City Art, Monuments and Markers convened to advise the Mayor on issues surrounding public art and historic monuments and markers on City-owned property. The website includes a link to the 2018 Commission report.

## **Mayor's Office of Arts and Culture**

City of Boston

<https://www.boston.gov/departments/arts-and-culture/public-art-under-review>

The Mayor's Office of Arts and Culture is seeking to understand how to ensure that Boston's public art reflects the diversity of people, histories, and perspectives in our city by cataloging the City's art collection, and creating an educational online database. By evaluating these Boston's public art, we can understand what is missing, and which artworks need to be reexamined. As part of the process, we seek public input in assessing our monuments and memorials. Community conversations will inform the Boston Art Commission's review of current and future artworks.

## **Memorials for the Future**

By Van Allen Institute

<https://www.vanalen.org/projects/memorials-for-the-future/>

The National Park Service (NPS), the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC), and Van Alen Institute collaborated on *Memorials for the Future*, an ideas competition to re-imagine how we think about, feel, and experience memorials. Results included an exhibition and report, *Not Set In Stone: Memorials for the Future*, 2016.

## **Monument Lab**

<https://monumentlab.com/about>

*Monument Lab* is a public art and history studio based in Philadelphia. *Monument Lab* works with artists, students, educators, activists, municipal agencies, and cultural institutions on participatory approaches to public engagement and collective memory. Founded by Paul Farber and Ken Lum in 2012, *Monument Lab* cultivates and facilitates critical conversations around the past, present, and future of monuments.

<https://monumentlab.com/projects/field-trip>

Monument Lab Field Trip is a hands-on activity guide to help you take a closer look at the monuments in your city or town. Investigate historical monuments in your community, ask questions about art and justice in public spaces, and propose your own ideas for a monument.

## **Monument Wars**

Washington, D.C., the National Mall, and the Transformation of the Memorial Landscape by Kirk Savage, 2001, published by University of California Press

<https://www.ucpress.edu/book/9780520271333/monument-wars>

The National Mall in Washington, D.C., is “a great public space, as essential a part of the American landscape as the Grand Canyon,” according to architecture critic Paul Goldberger, but few realize how recent, fragile, and contested this achievement is. In *Monument Wars*, Kirk Savage tells the Mall’s engrossing story—its historic plan, the structures that populate its corridors, and the sea change it reveals regarding national representation. Central to this narrative is a dramatic shift from the nineteenth-century concept of a decentralized landscape, or “ground”—heroic statues spread out in traffic circles and picturesque parks—to the twentieth-century ideal of “space,” in which authority is concentrated in an intensified center, and the monument is transformed from an object of reverence to a space of experience.

### **The Monuments Project**

<https://mellon.org/initiatives/monuments/faq/>

The Monuments Project is Mellon Foundation’s five-year, \$250 million grant program commitment to re-imagine and rebuild commemorative spaces and transform the way history is told in the United States.

The project seeks to ensure that future generations inherit a memorial landscape that venerates and reflects the vast, rich complexity of the American experience, and tells a fuller, more inclusive story of our history and our many different forbears.

### **New • Land • Marks**

Association for Public Art

<https://www.associationforpublicart.org/program/new-land-marks-public-art-community-and-the-meaning-of-place/>

*New • Land • Marks*: public art, community, and the meaning of place was a program of the Fairmount Park Art Association (now the Association for Public Art) was an award-winning initiative that brought together artists and community organizations to plan and create new works throughout Philadelphia. *New • Land • Marks* proposals incorporated public art into ongoing community development, urban greening, public amenities, and other revitalization initiatives. These efforts celebrated community identity, commemorated “untold” histories, and offered visionary, yet reasonable, ways to invigorate public spaces. For communities, the New•Land•Marks program was an opportunity to take an active role in defining the unique qualities of their neighborhoods. For artists, the program represented a chance to work directly with the public from an early point in the creative process. *New • Land • Marks* explored the central issue in today’s public art — namely, how to promote community engagement and, at the same time, create a framework for the most creative artistic outcome. The project resulted in a symposium (1999), community exhibition (2000) book, and the commissioning of projects identified through the program.

### **Public Art Controversy: Cultural Expression and Civic Debate**

By Erica Doss, 2006, Monograph Published by Americans for the Arts

[www.artsusa.org](http://www.artsusa.org)

Local conflicts over public art have occurred throughout the United States. This Monograph looks at several of those controversies.

