

MURAL GUIDELINES

Before you start

Getting permission always make sure that you have written permission to paint your design on the wall. This may involve the owner of the property and/or the local council approving the idea.

This can be quite a long, drawn out process, but it's important that you consult everyone well in advance (may be 6 - 12 months before starting).

Funding try local funding bodies first (BKRP, Beds Police, small arts grants, local council etc). Dulux Community Awards supplies paints for summer projects.

Informing local people make sure that anyone living nearby (or using the building) is informed well in advance that a wall is destined to be painted. It may be worth producing a flyer to hand out to passers-by and visitors.

Forming a group it works best when as many local people as possible are involved from the outset. Even those who say they can't paint will appreciate having an input with ideas etc.

Design stage measure the wall and be sure to include any details (pipes, windows, doors, radiators, sticky-out bits etc). Make a scale drawing (possibly using graph paper) and photocopy this onto A4 or A3 paper. Let your group work on these sheets to produce their basic ideas the final version may involve a combination of different people's drawings.

It always helps if the group can decide on a basic theme for the mural design try to go for something quite open (eg sport and leisure) although you'll always get someone who doesn't like the theme (you can't win on this one!). Try to bear in mind the ages of people who will see this mural a 'young, trendy design' / graffiti-style mural may work well in a youth club, but older people may not appreciate the idea in a more public space.

Preparing the wall

Most tins of paint give instructions, such as suitable undercoat, removing flaking paint, dust etc. Exterior walls often need a gentle rub down with a wire brush to remove loose paint, plaster, moss and so on. Pay particular attention to the bottom of the wall, where mud and dirt are more likely to be splashed.

Brick walls outdoors will probably need to be coated with a waterproof sealant, as the mortar will absorb moisture – this solution is usually in the same section as exterior masonry paints.

For the undercoat, the best paint is ‘Sandtex’ masonry paint – if possible, use the coarse grained paint as this gives a good, slightly textured surface for the next coat to stick to.

Emulsion can be used outdoors (despite what it says on the tin!), especially if the design is going to be varnished. Kitchen and bathroom paint (satin / silk finish) is the most suitable, as it tends to be more waterproof / washable.

Drop cloths

Some cheap, thin sheets are only suitable for fine sprays of paint (from rollers) – dollops of paint will easily soak through and end up making even more mess. Although they weigh more, thicker drop cloths are best (or even old, lined curtains). Plastic drop cloths do the job well as they’re not absorbent – however, they are not suitable for smooth ground and can be very slippery. Used on tarmac or rough ground, they stop any paint getting through – rolls of plastic table cloth are even better for running the whole length of any mural.

Avoid trip hazards by taping the cloth to the ground with duck tape (and to the bottom of the wall with masking tape).

Risk assessment

When visiting the site before painting sessions, you need to be aware of any possible health and safety issues that could arise (to the painting team and members of the public). Assess how you are going to create a safe environment in which to carry out the painting and obtain permission to cordon off the area, if necessary. Ideally, you will have a designated area for painting, whilst maintaining the public's right of way.

Be aware of manufacturers' guidelines on tins of paint, especially any warnings about use by young people, if applicable. Print out a copy of these instructions, including what to do if paint gets in someone's eyes, for instance. You should have a first aid kit on site for emergencies, plus someone with up-to-date first aid training in the group. Access to a mobile phone is also necessary, especially if you are painting in a remote area, away from streets / buildings.

During the sessions, be aware of any possible trip hazards – drop cloths, tins of paint, stools etc. Keep the painting area free of clutter at all times.

Try to clear up any mess as you go along – it's amazing how far one splodge of paint can spread if it's ignored by the person who spilt it.

Ladders and step ladders should only be used by adults. Small step stools can be a useful (and safe) way of allowing young people a chance to reach a bit higher on the design.

Storing / transporting paint

Follow manufacturers' guidelines for storage of paint (basically – not in too hot or cold a place). Try to find a lockable storage space as close to the site of the mural as possible – you may not be able to park your car anywhere near the site of the mural. Ideally, you will be able to store your brushes, rollers, trays, drop cloths etc. in the same place.

Getting the paint / equipment to the mural may involve some sort of trolley – shopping trolleys work well, as do ‘trolley bags’ (holdall on wheels) or even a wheelie bin!

Pack the trolley full of stuff and use drop cloths to pad it out and stop the paint tins falling over.

Try to make transporting the paint as easy as possible – don’t tire yourself out just getting the stuff there...

On site

Put up posters explaining about the project – it’s worth doing this a week before you start, to let people know what’s going on. Include a contact number, as you may get enquiries (maybe complaints) and possibly offers of help!

Ensure that you are not blocking the public’s right of way and that there are no potential trip hazards or obstructions. Keep a watchful eye on this throughout the painting sessions, as paint pots etc. may end up causing an obstruction.

You may need to use warning tape to cordon off the painting area and put up WET PAINT signs to warn the public. These signs should always be left up when leaving the site.

Have a designated area for storing the paint on site and ensure that the tins are not left open. It helps to have smaller containers (eg. strong margarine tubs) with lids, into which you can siphon paint. Cheap plastic plates can also be used as palettes.

Keep any empty paint pots, as these are handy for mixing up different shades of paint – also, the underside of the lids can be used as palettes.

What to wear (and not to wear)

Always advise your group to wear old clothes and make sure that this is emphasised in your publicity. Make sure that they are aware that 'old clothes' includes footwear and head gear – it's more likely that paint will splash onto heads or feet, so don't wear your best trainers / baseball cap! It is worth having a 'get-out-clause', stating that you cannot be held responsible for any damage to clothing. Make sure that anyone turning up to paint in their Sunday best is informed about the hazards of paint on clothes.

Here's an example of 'rules' we've supplied in the past:

Painting murals

We will be using emulsion paint for the mural, which is washable with warm water.

We recommend that you wear old clothes (and that includes old footwear) as dried on paint can be hard to remove.

Please note that BCA & Sure Start cannot take responsibility for any damage to clothing on this project.

Documenting the project

Make sure that you have photographs of the wall(s) before you start on your design – no matter how grubby they look!

It is worth picking a few different viewpoints and returning to the same spots as the design develops, to photograph the mural stage by stage. For action shots, it may be worth having someone who is not involved in the painting to capture the group at work.