

**An Art Trail is a community of artists who open up their studios/workspaces to the public during a specific weekend or day. A map and signposts are usually provided to show participants where to go and which artists to they can see.**

Art Trails grow and develop over time and each trail has its own unique identity based on the ideas and vision of the community of artists that organise it. Some arts trails are based on the showing and selling of work in the visual arts. Some are community events that include many different art forms and performances. Some artists invite you into their homes and some artists show their works in venues such as church and community halls, cafes, galleries and other public spaces. Online/virtual Art Trails are a possibility, but the most common approach remains the open studio trail.

Art lovers armed with a map identify and visit studios and galleries. On their way they may stop for coffee or to eat at local restaurants and cafes. They learn about the work of the artists they visit and may buy original artworks. They learn about the area and meet people who live there.

Artists get to inform participants about their work. They have the opportunity to make sales. They may be exposed to ideas, collectors and buyers. They will certainly get together with other artists and share work and ideas.

## GETTING STARTED

### Identifying the Opportunity

Where is the Art Trail to be located? Draw an initial map and then research to see what opportunities already exist for artists and the public within these boundaries. Search the internet, local council website, art schools or workshops, local galleries, any regional galleries, other Art Trails, and festivals. Explore the local newspaper for artist advertisements, explore notice boards in cafes, schools, shops, the library. Find a copy of Art Guide Australia and/or Art Almanac and check to see what is listed in your local area.

### Getting others involved

Visit local galleries, go the library, put up a sign to call a meeting. Invite local artists and other potential partners. This first meeting is just to kick off. Talk about:

- Has an Art Trail has been tried before? What worked? What didn't?
- Who wants to get involved?

- Can we all work together?
- What does each of us bring to the Art Trail?

### Set up your management structure

Determine your structure, keep it simple! You are most likely to be a Not-For-Profit organisation. Do you wish to work as a co-operative or by committee? You may wish to formalise this structure with simple rules (a constitution). You may need to register as a co-operative, association or company. This will create a legal entity rather than individual members taking responsibility. (see NAVA Guidelines for ARIs on Steps to becoming Incorporated and Governance Models for ARIs)

Make sure you have the right insurance. If your Art Trail does not carry appropriate insurance, participating artists may need to insure against the probability of an accident to a visitor to their studio, or to their artwork, or perhaps even theft and damage. On the other hand, Local Council may be prepared to auspice the Art Trail for Insurance purposes. You will need a contract with Local Government and there may be further conditions.

### How often will the Art Trail be open?

Will your Art Trail open once a month, once a week, or perhaps seasonally when there are more tourists or other visitors to the area? Could it be associated with a local festival and/or event or as its own festival? Agree upon dates and/or a schedule and work towards it.

### Write up your Proposal

Develop a concept statement and proposal based upon a simple, clear business plan. It should include how many artists are likely to be involved, how many visitors it will draw to the area, and other benefits to the community and local business. This proposal will be used to pitch to sponsors, grant opportunities, local council and other statutory and government entities.

## MAKING YOUR ART TRAIL WORK

### Get that concept proposal out there and develop your relationships

Network. Talk to local council. Trail the internet for grants and sponsors. Talk to government, local business, libraries and schools, local tourist accommodation cafes and restaurants, professional artists associations, local and regional galleries. (see NAVA Guidelines for Networking and Your Local Community).

## Space

Get an address and meeting space. Write to the neighbours, explain the concept and ask for their support. Hold a meeting, have lots of meetings to identify and address any concerns the community and neighbours may have.

## Skills

Identify the skills you are going to need; design, marketing, financial, organisational, social media and website skills, practical and administrative. Do you have them on your committee? Can you find mentors, volunteers, sponsors or other partners to fill in any gaps?

Who is going to develop content and/or design maps and guides for the Studio Trail? Who is going to interview, collect and write biographies and artists statements? Draw up participating cafes and restaurants and accommodation? Finalise map and information guides? Consider hiring a designer and copywriter or finding local professionals willing to contribute to the Art Trail. Perhaps Council or a local business can help. Perhaps there is local designer on your committee?

It may also be a good idea to organise training for the individual artists on your Trail regarding operating as a sole trader, marketing and sales and their responsibilities to visitors to their studio. NAVA or Local Council may be able to help you with this.

## **SORT OUT MONEY**

You may need to look for funding to help get the Art Trail started, perhaps for the costs of materials, the printing of proposals and maps, administration, establishing a website, marketing and advertising. Make a list of each item of expenditure and cost it. Add it all up.

Make a list of all the income you have or you aim to attract, such as grants. Against each item of expenditure identify where you are going to get the money from, e.g. grants, donations. Don't forget to cost volunteer labour, committee members' time and contributions in kind. There are various routes you can use to gain funding. Consider family and friends, crowdfunding, grants and loans, and donations and sponsorships from local business.

Remember your concept proposal and your business plan. These can be adopted for grant applications or pitched to business and potential partners for

sponsorship. Have a meeting. Have lots of meetings. Here are some people who make help locally:

- Local Council may have grants you can use to develop your committee, or training for artists, or for the event as a whole. The Council may be able to give the Art Trail committee meeting space, photocopying and/or meeting rooms.
- Local Cafes and restaurants on your trail may be prepared to promote the Art Trail, if they are featured on the Art Trail map or other publicity.
- Local accommodation may sponsor advertising or help promote through their website. They may distribute maps and information to their guests.
- Local media may write up the Art Trail in an article or give you free advertising, Consider not just the print press, but local radio or TV.
- Rotary and Lions offer small grants which could use for printing, design etc. They may be able to connect you up with businesses willing to sponsor the Art Trail.

## **MARKETING**

The main reasons for advertising your art trail will be to create awareness among the public and persuade them to attend, as well as to promote the benefits of the Art Trail to the community, and to keep up the profile of your Art Trail.

All that work you have put into building up relationships with council, government, local business, local library and galleries will help you with this. Ask if they will cross-promote wherever they can. Other arts organisations such as NAVA, and State-based artists organisations may be able to promote and cross promote your Art Trail.

Instead of taking out ads in the local press, telephone them and propose an article tell them why the Art Trail will be great for local business and the community. Profile an artists or two. If you have local TV or radio contacts, use them and propose a story on local artists and the Art Trail. Make connections and maintain them so you can promote particular artists or events in the future.

## **Online and social media**

This will probably be the most important form of promotion for your Art Trail. A website and/or an Art Trail Facebook page are likely to be an important aspect of your online marketing. Consider your content. Use images and embedded videos if you can. Consider e-newsletters and blogs. Make sure your

content is suitable for mobile devices as this is most likely what your public will be using especially maps. Share your content across a range of related platforms and cross promote.

## **People**

Participating artists are the biggest assets in building up your art trail. Be positive, professional, and generous. Talk to all your friends, everyone you meet. Let your enthusiasm create further ambassadors for the Art Trail. Talk to local press again, talk to local business, send out invitations.

Brief neighbours, participants and partners prior to the day of the Art Trail. Brief volunteers and artists. Make sure everyone knows what to expect, where everything is and how to behave. Make sure studios, cafes and accommodation venues have lots of maps and information. Keep everyone in the Loop!

## **KEEPING YOUR ART TRAIL ALIVE**

After the day of your first Art Trail thank everybody. EVERYBODY. Make sure they know how their contribution was appreciated, no matter how small or how big. Seek feedback. Consider the feedback. Review your concept and your process.

Start this process again for the next Art Trail!

## **FURTHER INFORMATION**

**NAVA Code of Practice** has detailed information on artist-run-spaces.  
[www.visualarts.net.au/code-of-practice](http://www.visualarts.net.au/code-of-practice)

**Guides and Factsheets** to setting up an organisation can be found on the NAVA website.

**Local council** websites may have information on existing art trails in your local area, or someone you can speak to about establishing one.