

Urban Pathways to Healthy Neighborhoods

Focus on: Art

What are Urban Pathways?

Urban pathways go by many names, including bikeways, trails and greenways. These pathways are used for healthy recreation and—when seamlessly interconnected with pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure like sidewalks and bicycle lanes—can be ideal routes for active transportation, including biking and walking.

Part of the Solution

In many urban areas across the country, low-income populations and communities of color face disproportionate challenges of obesity, difficult commutes and scarcity of open space. Promoting the development and use of urban pathways can help address these challenges by integrating physical activity into daily routines and connecting residents with green spaces and providing cost-effective solutions to improving community health.

The Urban Pathways Initiative

Through the generous support of The Kresge Foundation, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) launched the Urban Pathways Initiative to advocate for equitable investment in vulnerable communities that promote the health, transportation and environmental benefits of trail use. Learn more at www.railstotrails.org/urbanpathways.



Photo: Slavic Village Development Corp.

Public art gives a sense of destination, highlights community identity and adds interest to trails. Murals, sculptures and other installations can provide a welcoming environment and create opportunities for public engagement and youth programming. Public art can also serve a dual purpose, as murals in urban trail corridors aid in the abatement of illegal graffiti. Local arts and cultural affairs commissions often provide funding for murals and other public art projects. Public art is also eligible for federal funding through Transportation Enhancements under the “Landscaping and scenic beautification” activity¹. Many urban trails incorporate public art; following are examples from Chicago, Ill., Washington, D.C., Richmond, Calif., and Cleveland, Ohio.

This issue summary is part of a series that explores best practices and lessons learned from urban pathways across the United States. To access the entire series visit www.railstotrails.org/urbanpathways/lessons.

Engage local community residents, create partnerships to increase access to resources and support, and identify a group that can take ownership of the project so it has a support system after it's installed.

Chicago, Ill. Bloomingdale Trail

Friends of the Bloomingdale Trail partnered with Chicago Public Art Group to offer a series of hands-on workshops to create a long sitting wall decorated with nature-inspired clay moldings. The installation was part of a larger public art project in Albany Whipple Park along the Bloomingdale Trail.

Contact:

Friends of the Bloomingdale Trail, www.bloomingdaletrail.org



Photos: Chicago Public Art



Incorporating graffiti-style artwork can be a great way to engage youth, but be sure to educate local officials and the community about the purpose of the piece and its implementation.

Richmond, Calif.

Gompers Garden in Richmond created a graffiti mural and had city permission but was still required to remove it by code enforcement. After going to city council and reaching out to city staff, they were able to reinstall the mural, but a great deal of extra effort was used to paint it twice!

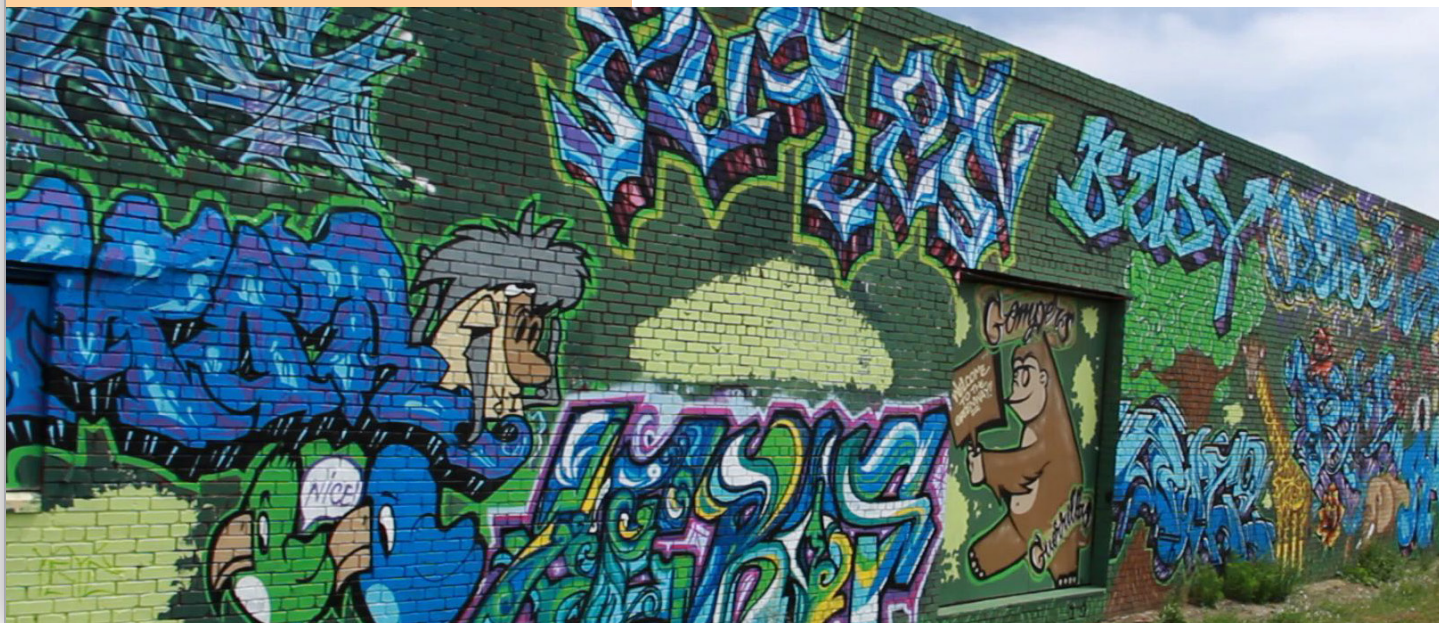




Photo: Armonte Butler

Work with street artists and/or the arts community to bring talent, community outreach resources and funding to your project.

Washington, D.C.

A year before a section of the Met Branch Trail was constructed, the DC Commission for the Arts and Humanities (DCCA) recognized the importance of locating the city's largest mural near the trail. They commissioned local arts group Albus Cavus to work with other local and well-known street artists, muralists and a nearby youth program to complete the neighborhood and transit-inspired "Edgewood to the Edge of the World."

Since the mural's completion in 2009, the DCCA has worked with other youth groups and street artists to complete two more large-scale murals. The trail is becoming known as a "walking gallery."

Contact:

DC Commission for the Arts and Humanities
<http://dcarts.dc.gov>



Photo: Gabriela Vega Kock



Photo: ©Richard Anderson



MORGANA RUN TRAIL • CLEVELAND, OHIO • LENGTH: TWO MILES • OPENED IN 2007

Lessons:

Develop a public art plan, build partnerships to implement projects, involve the community.

Cleveland's Morgana Run Trail is a two-mile rail-trail through one of the city's most historical neighborhoods, Slavic Village. The old railroad ran through the heart of the community, and when it ceased operation the corridor quickly became overgrown, neglected and a haven for undesired graffiti. In the past few years, community groups created a vision for a more friendly and welcoming trail corridor and transformed the previously dilapidated area into one of the community's greatest assets.

As soon as the trail was constructed, many of the adjacent large buildings became highly visible and were covered with illegal graffiti. In 2007, a local community development organization, Slavic Village Development (SVD), partnered with Cleveland Public Art and ParkWorks to commission two local artists to develop a public art master plan for the Morgana Run Trail. The plan identified numerous goals for art along the trail, including raising awareness of the trail, improving access to the pathway and assuring positive experiences for trail users.

The first part of this vision, *Pixelating Morgana*, began as a collaboration among artists Christopher Diehl, Shaun Breslin and John Troxel. Using the side of the Lextech



building, a local manufacturer that was an enthusiastic supporter, the artists designed a stunning 300-foot-by-20-foot mural. This mural, the largest in the city of Cleveland, was a community effort, and the artists welcomed visitors to the site as they were painting. The abstract piece now adorns the wall of the building along the most visible part of the trail. Just a few blocks past *Pixelating* is another impressive mural. The 250-foot-long work depicts Clevelanders enjoying themselves in all manner of active recreation, from biking to swimming.

In the summer of 2010, with support from SVD, Cleveland Public Art and ParkWorks artist Jake Beckham designed *Rotoforma*, a 35-foot-tall sculpture that sits at the 49th Street trail-head. The piece is designed to look like an allium flower and was fabricated by Signature Sign Company, a local manufacturer.

The growing collection of public art along the Morgana Run Trail is a testament to the power of public art as an element of community revitalization. By developing lasting partnerships and engaging community residents, SVD created an effective public art master plan that will continue to proliferate, drawing more community residents and visitors to the trail.

For more information:

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Photo: Courtesy of Cleveland Public Art

