

## Traffic Signal Utility Box Art

### Public Agency Program Examples

#### *El Cerrito*

Artists are responsible for purchasing their own painting, prepping, and sealing supplies. Artists may enlist painting assistants. The boxes are painted in fade resistant acrylic paint. Darker colors over large area are avoided because of heat and potential damage to utility box equipment.

The artist or artist group will receive a \$2,500 award for the creation of the final design for each utility box. 50% (or \$1,250) of the payment will be issued prior to the start of the painting and 50% (or \$1,250) will be issued upon satisfactory completion of the project.

#### *Costa Mesa*

The City manages repairs and replacements for up to 3 years. The City uses vinyl wraps which last an average of 3 years because colors fade slower than a typical house paint or acrylic.

Artists receive an honorarium of \$300 per box. City has a sponsor program to generate funds for an artist honorarium. The cost to sponsor a box for up to 3 years is between \$1500-2,000.

### Funding

Programs are funded by local art organizations, commissions, community sponsored, or funded by the public agency. Art maintenance responsibility varies by agency – the artist maintains, or agency staff maintains.

### Graffiti/Vandalism

Public Works was unable to find specific data from other agencies that suggests that public art results in less graffiti and other vandalism. Anecdotally, Public Works have heard from other agencies that public art appears to reduce incidents of graffiti and vandalism in communities with local art.

Studies have shown that neighborhoods with murals and other forms of public art often experience a reduction in vandalism and graffiti. The presence of art can enhance community pride and ownership, leading residents to take better care of their surroundings.

Moreover, programs that replace graffiti with murals have been implemented in various cities, leading to a noticeable decline in graffiti incidents. Overall, while not a guaranteed solution, public art has been shown to contribute positively to community safety and aesthetics.

Here are a few studies and reports that discuss the relationship between public art and reductions in graffiti and vandalism:

1. **Journal of Urban Design:** This study examined the impact of public art on urban environments and found that areas with vibrant murals and community art

experienced lower levels of graffiti and vandalism, likely due to increased community pride and engagement.

2. **"The Role of Public Art in Urban Renewal"**: A report by the National Endowment for the Arts discusses various case studies where murals and public art projects contributed to neighborhood revitalization and reduced crime rates, including vandalism.
3. **Case Studies from Cities**: Several cities, such as San Francisco and Philadelphia, have implemented mural programs that resulted in significant decreases in graffiti. Reports from these cities often highlight how engaging local artists and communities can lead to better maintenance and a reduction in vandalism.
4. **Community Impact Reports**: Organizations like the Mural Arts Program in Philadelphia publish annual reports detailing the impact of their projects, often citing decreases in crime and vandalism in areas where murals are installed.

In summary, public art instills pride in a community and helps to create a sense of belonging in place for the residents. However, these works need to be well-maintained. All of those studies talk about the need for maintenance. The reason you need maintenance is because all public art is subject to graffiti.

The key is to be diligent and have a program in place to maintain the works graffiti-free. The works in and of themselves are not a guarantee against vandalism, and they need to be put in place with a plan to be able to have quick removal of graffiti. Public art can have the best impact if going in, the locality is aware graffiti will happen and has a plan for immediate removal.

### **Utility Box Art Programs - Process Options**

The following was offered as the definition of Utility Box Art within the proposed Contra Costa County Public Art Policy:

Utility Box Art is the enhancement of County owned utility boxes through the application of artwork created by Artists. Utility Box Art programs traditionally have two approaches: either the artwork is painted directly on to the utility boxes by the Artist, or the artwork is applied to utility boxes as vinyl wraps printed with the Artist's design. Utility Box Art will be considered Temporary Public Art due to their susceptibility to damage or deterioration due to environmental conditions.

As indicated, there are two primary options for the fabrication of Utility Box artworks. The following reflects pros and cons for consideration in identifying the mechanism for applying artwork:

#### **1. Art painted directly on box surfaces:**

##### **Pros:**

- "Original" hand-painted appearance similar to murals
- Potentially long-lasting lifespan

Cons:

- Requires liability insurance for artists to paint on-site or County Counsel approved liability waiver system
- Paint cannot be removed easily; artwork removal would require overpainting which can result in multiple layers of paint.
- A rotation of artwork designs will result in multiple paint layers and may have “ghost images” of previous images/brushstrokes from heavier paint application.

**2. Art transferred to vinyl wrapping applied to box surfaces**

Pros:

- Easy removal and replacement of designs--allowing for an easy rotation for more artists to participate
- Installation by insured specialized contractors
- Artwork does not leave a lasting imprint on boxes

Cons:

- Does not have a hand-painted appearance
- Could be more subject to fading—which would be minimized as a concern with a timely rotation of artworks
- During hot weather, it is possible that the wrap may peel off the cabinet or trap heat in the cabinet, affecting the electronics.

Contra Costa County

Public Works maintains approximately 155 County-owned traffic signal utility boxes. Traffic signal utility boxes are approximately 6 feet tall x 2 feet side x 2.5 feet deep. These above ground utility boxes are visible to the public and potential opportunities for utility box public art.

Each Supervisorial District includes approximately 15-45 signal utility boxes.

The estimated cost per box for an artist to paint and maintain or County staff to apply and maintain vinyl wrap is \$2,500-\$5,000 per box. If boxes are County funded, Public Works recommends a budget allocation of \$20,000 to develop a program based on policy decisions determined by the Board and an additional \$5,000 allocation per box for implementation (future maintenance/coordination with artist for removal/replacement).

Public Works recommends a pilot program – 6 boxes, 3 paint and 3 vinyl wrap to evaluate the pros and cons of the materials and required maintenance. Staff shall determine whether paint or vinyl wrap is appropriate based on the location and sun exposure.

The draft Public Art Policy recommends that designs submitted will be selected by a Public Art Selection Committee with final approval of designs by the Public Art Advisory Committee.