A Guide to Requests for Qualifications (RFQ)

According to Americans for the Arts, a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) invites artists to send their qualifications to be reviewed by the selection committee but does not require a specific proposal to be submitted. RFQs are used to choose artists based on their past and current art and achievements. Often, a statement of interest that addresses the goals of the project is requested.

A Call for Artists is an opportunity notice that gives artists the necessary information about a project in order to apply. The site description, budget, timeline, eligibility guidelines and public art goals are some of the basic requirements to be included in any Call for Artists/RFQ. Issuing a Call for Artists is a standard practice in the public art field. There are currently more than 350 public art programs in the United States in rural and urban areas; in federal, state, county and city government agencies; or private nonprofit or for-profit organizations run independently or as part of a local arts agency.

All versions of Calls for Artists can take place online to alleviate the processing of multiple (sometimes hundreds) of submission materials. Currently (in 2013), there are three on-line options (callforentry.org, slideroom.com, and publicartist.org) with many programs opting to create their own on-line application system. These options are changing rapidly and it is best to conduct on-line research regarding the best choice for your program.

Call Elements: Definitions & Descriptions
Once you've decided to write a Call for Artists, there are essential pieces of information that should be included. Below is a reference list that includes advice on how to clearly convey your information.

Call Summary
A brief project summary. The Call Summary helps artists quickly decide whether they are interested or eligible for the call and lets organizations posting the call decide how it should be promoted. Include the project name, commissioning organization, application deadline, project timeline, budget, geographic eligibility requirements, and whether it is an RFQ or RFP.

Project Description
An overview of the artist's scope of services. Describe whether it is a design-team project, commission for new work, integrated art, functional art replacing functional items, master plan, artist residency, purchase of existing art, or other type of opportunity. Include a description of the organization overseeing the project.

Art Goals or Criteria
A list of any predetermined objectives for the art established by the commissioning organization, funder, or community. The specificity of the objectives will vary by commissioning organization and reflects the characteristics of each project. The list can be broad – e.g., create a sense of place within the community – or specific – e.g., design streetscape elements that reflect the industrial history of the neighborhood.

Site or Art Location Plans
Site plans, maps, photographs, or other visual information of the site or art location. Describe the site's function; include what activities will happen there and who uses it. Be sure to include whether or not the site is open to the public, or if the public can see but not enter the site. Include a description or history of the site and community where the art will be and list additional resources for the artist to research. Often a site for the art is determined prior to selecting an artist. Site is determined by the administrator or public art committee along with the design team in consultation with city staff. An alternative approach is to select an artist and let them be part of the decision about the best site.

Art Location Description
A description of where the art will be within the project site. Sometimes the location for art is predetermined by the funder, commissioning organization, or community before a Call for Artists is

distributed. If this applies to your project, provide a highly detailed description of where the art will be located within the site, especially for an RFP. The description should include, but not be limited to: Engineering and architectural information about the location's structure, materials used at the location, visibility within the site, and lighting information. If the art location is not predetermined, state whether or not the artist will be free to participate in selecting the art site.

Budget
The amount of funding allocated to art for the project. Clearly state the budget for art and what is expected to be covered (not all projects have the same expectations of project costs covered by the art budget). For instance, in a design-team project, the budget may include only the costs of artists' fees and travel. In the commissioning of art, project costs may include the artist's fee, travel, engineering, materials, fabrication, transportation, documentation, and oversight of installation but not actual installation costs.

Often costs for insurance, taxes, studio overhead, and miscellaneous items are not included in an artist's budget by the artist or commissioning agency. It should be clear from the beginning which costs may legitimately be included in the artist's budget and which are covered by others. Finally, in some cases an actual art project budget has not been set at the time an artist is selected. It is important to determine the amount that is secured for the project and the art and what must be raised to realize each.

Artist Eligibility
The qualifications that an artist must meet in order to be eligible for a project. Questions to consider include:
- Must the artist live/work in a certain geographic area or is the call open to artists nationally?
- Is the call only open to professional artists or are students eligible?
- Are artist teams eligible for the project?
- Must the artist have completed a project with a similar budget, scale, and scope?

If you are seeking to reach out to certain types of artists, include a sentence encouraging artists that meet those objectives to apply. For example, if the commissioning organization is seeking to reach out to emerging artists, include a statement such as "professional artists who are new to the field of public art are encouraged to apply." Or if the project is one that will involve a high level of community interaction in a specific setting, include a statement such as "artists who have experience interacting with community are encouraged to apply."

This is also the place to include an equal opportunity statement that may be required by the commissioning organization, local municipality, funder, or owner.

Application Requirements
The list of materials artists should send by mail or online with their applications. Be very specific about the information artists should include with their application since it determines how it is presented to the panel reviewing applicants and selecting artists. Typical application requirements include:
- Visual support materials
- Annotated lists
- Statement of interest, often restricted to a number of words (e.g. 200 words)
- Resume or short biography
- Self-addressed stamped envelope (SASE) for the return of hardcopy materials (Generally materials are submitted online only)
- Project proposal (for RFPs)

Visual support materials can include digital images in specific formats, slides, videos, CDs, and prints or photocopies. If requesting digital images, list the number of images artists may submit and how they should be labeled. If a panel is reviewing digital images, CDs or video, in addition to the number of images be specific about length of time for moving images and the formats the panel will be capable of viewing. Identify the number of copies of support materials the artist is to include.

Examples:
For visual art, up to a total of 10 images of past work on a CD. All images must be in JPEG format (.jpg), and 1024 pixels (14.222 inches) on the longest side, formatted at 72 dpi. Each image filename must be named as follows: artist's last name, first initial, underscore, and number corresponding to the number on the image list (e.g. smithp_01.jpg). No personal websites will be reviewed. If using a Mac, be sure to use the appropriate Windows filename extension (e.g.: "smithp_01.jpg" rather than "smithj_01")

The annotated image list allows the artist to describe the visual support material and usually includes: description, material, location, budget, client or commissioning organization, and any other relevant project information. The statement of interest allows artists to introduce themselves and describe their specific interest in a project, their potential approach to the project or creating public art, answer any specific questions presented in the RFQ and describe any past relevant experience.

If artist teams may apply, clearly state if you require additional visual support materials, resume, and references for each team member. If you are inviting and paying artists to develop proposals, clearly list the types of submission materials you would like the artist to submit to best present their work to the review panel. Typical proposal submission materials include: project description, drawings, renderings, model, photographs, materials list, budget, timeline, references, fabrication, installation, and maintenance information.

Deadline
The date when an application must be either received or postmarked. List the date by which an application must be either received at the mailing or online address or postmarked. Be sure to state if overnight or express delivery is NOT permitted.

Submission Email Address
Supply an alternate address for this type of delivery. If only online submissions are acceptable, clearly state that there will be no mailed submissions accepted.

Selection Process
A description of how the applications will be reviewed and an artist selected. Include the types of people who are on the selection panel, e.g., art and design professionals, community representatives, agency representatives, and funders. Include the number, or range, of finalists that will be selected and what will be required of the finalists, including interviews, proposals, dates for presentations, and travel. Typically, there are three finalists, but no more than five. If finalists are subject to interview, state if a fee and travel expenses are covered as well as timeline for interviews and who will participate in the interview process and make the final artist selection.
If proposals are required, provide artists with information about what is included in a proposal, timeline, budget, etc., and fee for proposal, travel, and presentation, and decision-making schedule.

Selection Criteria
<u>A list of the criteria established by the commissioning agency or artist selection panel that will guide the evaluation of applications</u>. Listing the selection criteria establishes the priorities of the artist selection panel. The list also assists artists when considering whether they should apply for a project. For example, if the criteria for the RFQ includes artistic excellence, evidence of working in the field of public art for more than five years, and experience working in community settings, artists new to public art will be informed that their qualifications are not a good fit for the project.

Project Timeline
<u>The timeline the project will follow from artist selection to project completion</u>. The timeline includes dates for the following milestones, as they apply: Submission deadline, panel review, finalist notification, interview schedule, proposal presentations, final artist selection, contract, design review phases, fabrication and installation schedule for art coordinated with project construction, and completion date.

Sources for Additional Information
A list of resources the artist may consult for additional project information on the project, site, commissioning organization, community, area history, etc. Providing artists a list of resources they can consult about different aspects of the project can help them decide if they want to apply and if their work is a good fit with the project parameters. In the case of an RFP, the list can be a launching point for research. Include website addresses, publications, contact information for organizations, and other information that would be helpful and relevant to artists as they research the project.

General Statement about the Commissioning Agency
For example: City of Apache Junction
Located east of Phoenix in both Maricopa and Pinal counties, the City of Apache Junction has a population of approximately 42,500. The city is named for the junction of the Apache Trail and the Old West Highway, an intersection on an unpaved stagecoach trail. The westernmost peak of the Superstition Mountains is nearby. This diverse community is known for its natural beauty and Western heritage.

Primary Source: Americans for the Arts Public Art Network, "Artist Selection Resource Guide," 7/11/2013