PERCENT FOR ART

CONTEXT

What is it?

A "percent for art" program is a state or local ordinance requiring that a set percentage—typically 1–2%—of public construction projects fund commissioning or purchasing public artwork.

The funds are usually used to integrate art into the project itself (sculptures, murals, or design elements) or placed in a dedicated public art fund for future installations.

What does public art look like?

In Illinois, we have a rich inventory of public art. In most cases, public art looks like:

- Murals
- Sculptures
- Monuments



But public art can also be:

- Asphalt art in high pedestrian areas
- Performance spaces in parks and public spaces
- Performances and other types of cultural engagement
- Temporary cultural activations like festivals, fairs, and markets
- And so much more….



What's important is that it is created for and experienced in publicly accessible spaces like parks, plazas, or building exteriors, and is engaging and accessible for the community.

And public art isn't limited to publicly owned spaces!



Illinois

Art-in Architecture Program

Since 1977, the Illinois Capital Development Board's Art-in-Architecture program has purchased or commissioned more than 1,000 works of art by Illinois artists. Public buildings built or renovated by the State with a $1M+ budget are required to set aside one-half of one percent (0.5%) to purchase or commission public art.

1000+
works of art

0.5%
set aside

Chicago

Percent for Art Ordinance

In 1978, Chicago became one of the first—and the largest—U.S. cities to adopt a Percent-for-Art Ordinance into its official building program, dedicating a share of eligible City-led construction and major renovation budgets to public art. The Chicago Public Art Collection now includes more than 700 works of art in 150+ municipal facilities.

The ordinance was updated in 1987, increasing the set-aside from 1% to 1.33%. Since then, other cities have gone further:

- **raising their percentage,**
- **expanding definitions of public art to include performances and other cultural engagement, and**
- **extending requirements to private development.**

What's the difference between public and private?

Private development is construction undertaken by individuals, companies, or nonprofits for their own use. Those are things like apartment buildings, restaurants, sporting arenas, manufacturing or shipping facilities, or data centers.

Public development is built and funded by government agencies for public benefit, like a city building a new library or courthouse.

Percent for Arts in Private Development?

Where it exists

It exists throughout the country! Even here in Illinois, in one instance. The states that are leading the way with Public Art in Private Development ordinances are:

California
57 communities

Florida
13 communities

All other states have 3 or fewer communities with such ordinances.

In Illinois there is one!

Algonquin, located in McHenry/Kane Counties, has a Public Art in Private Development ordinance outlining three different ways new development projects can comply with their public art program:

1. Provide and maintain artwork, as approved by the Algonquin Public Arts Commission
2. Reserve a display site and pay a fee
3. Contribute to the Public Art Reserve Fund

Explore the Public Art in Private Development Spaces Database

Featuring ordinances and other materials from communities across the country.

Public Art in Public Development

Perhaps the most immediate way to increase public art in your community is to champion policies and funding programs that either support or require public art.

1. Reach out to your local city council, county board, or other local government entity about adopting a Percent for Art program, looking first at public development projects.
2. Think about how existing state and local grant programs, including those focused on economic development, community safety, or other local issues, could be used for public art.
3. Advocate for a broader definition of public art. What art activations or place-based initiatives in your area could be supported through a dedicated Percent for Art program?

Public Art in Private Development

Communities can encourage public art in private development through incentives, requirements, or a combination of both.

Incentives
Tie arts contribution requirements to existing incentives, like tax breaks, reduced parking requirements, or zoning code variances.

Requirements could include:

- Commissioning artwork for a development site
- Contributing to a public fund for art (similar to fee-in-lieu programs often used for parkland requirements)
- A combination of both

Requirement
Adopt a stand-alone ordinance that requires developers to either install artwork onsite or pay into the art fund during the permit stage. *This option is more attractive if you are in a high-demand area for development.*

Hybrid
Combine incentives and requirements across both public and private development, with eligible uses extending beyond traditional public art to include programming and cultural facilities.

ENGAGE

Would your community support public art requirements or incentives? Is there already local advocacy around this?

What kind of art would you like to see in public spaces?

NEXT STEPS

Do you want to get involved in advocating for a local percent-for-art policy?

Leave your email on the clipboard below!