

Tips for Those Commissioning

1. Select a small working party.
2. Agree upon what the piece is intended to do - to celebrate, commemorate, symbolise something or someone, enhance an existing site, or whatever, but keep it simple.
3. There should be one member of the working party responsible for carrying the project through from start to finish, this individual to provide a first point of contact for the selected artist, throughout the duration of the project. This person should be prepared to champion the project when the ride gets bumpy and not to leave the artist embattled and isolated; in other words, to act more as a partner than an employer.
4. Procure funds if possible before advertising the commission. If this not possible, ensure that it is made clear that funds are not in place but yet to be found.
5. Decide how much of the overall budget will be ringfenced for the work. This should include fees for the shortlisted submissions (I suggest 10%), procurement of the work, delivery, installation. Then decide how the balance remaining will be apportioned between administration, advertising, PR and inauguration/unveiling event.
6. Consider very carefully whether or not to engage an art consultant. If the working party has a good idea of what they are looking for, a secretary/administrator may be all you need. If it is found necessary to engage an art consultant, make sure that he or she isn't pushing a particular stable of artists and is operating as an honest broker, casting the net wide. Bear in mind that consultants can eat into the budget.
7. Agree upon a brief and keep it short and sweet.
8. Make the terms of the brief clear with nothing optional, so that when submissions come in they are consistent and therefore easy to compare one with another.
9. If you require maquettes from the short list, stipulate that these should all be to the same scale, typically 1 to 10 or 1 to 20.
10. State number of drawings required and the size of board they are to be mounted on.
11. Statements. Artist statements should all be roughly the same length, say between 400 and 500 words.
12. During the selection process, emphasise that there is a fixed budget and ascertain whether proposals are realistically costed. It is all too easy to select a seductive proposal which cannot possibly be realised within the budget.
13. Frontload the project. Very rarely are competition submission fees in this country commensurate with the work involved and I consider this to be a serious flaw in the

way things are typically done here. The consequence is that the catchment of artists willing to participate is limited to those prepared to work for a measly fee. Often this rules out the best artists, who are too busy to risk such a long shot for little reward. The client loses out by failing to access the best talent available. Artists lose out through exploitation. The answer is simple - invest more at the front end of the project. I suggest you should allocate 10% of an overall budget ringfenced for proposal fees, thereby giving reasonable compensation to participants and attracting a wider spectrum of talent.

14. Ensure that the jury's decision is final and cannot be subsequently overturned, which can invalidate and waste everybody's time.