

# LAUNCH YOUR OWN STORM DRAIN ART CONTEST

## How-To Guide



A man with a beard and tattoos is painting a storm drain with blue paint. He is using a brush to apply the paint, which is being mixed with water in a white cup. A paint can is also visible on the ground. The background is a dirt surface.

## CLEAN WATER IS AN ART

In the spring of 2016, the City of Richmond Department of Public Utilities launched its first annual Storm Drain Art Project. Our goal? To educate the public that pollutants that go into storm drains impact the James River and other Richmond waterways. We wanted to paint a picture of how important it is to keep our river – and our drinking water – clean. So we invited local artists to do just that with our Storm Drain Art Contest.

The result was a half-mile stretch of beautifully painted storm drains that made a positive impact on the local community and raised awareness of the importance of clean water. Want to launch a Storm Drain Art Contest in your own community? We've put together a guide to help you get started.

## THE CONTEST

First, we identified five key storm drains that carry stormwater directly into our local James River. Next, we invited local artists to submit their storm drain art designs based on the theme “It All Drains To the James.” A panel of judges, including representatives from the Richmond Public Art Commission, then chose five winners to paint their art on the storm drains. The five selected artists each received a stipend for their materials, time and work, as well as publicity for their art. Once the five drains were painted, city residents were able to vote via an online portal for their “Fan Favorite” storm drain, and that artist received additional recognition.

# TIMING

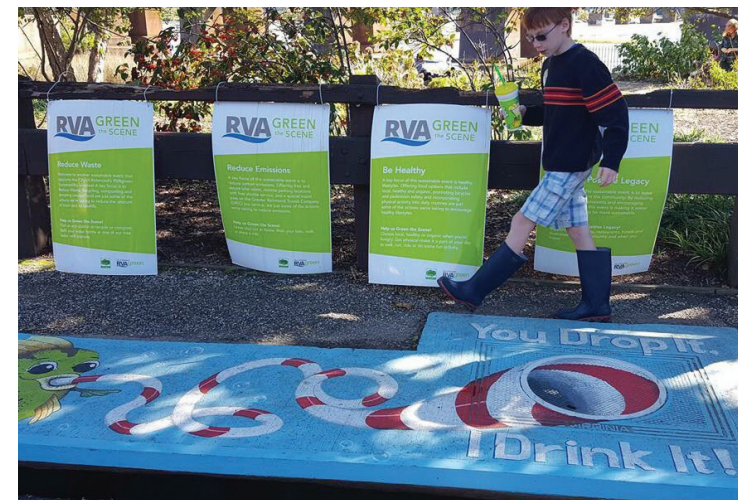
From conceptualization to implementation, the duration of the project spanned a timeline of approximately five months. An example of the schedule is below.

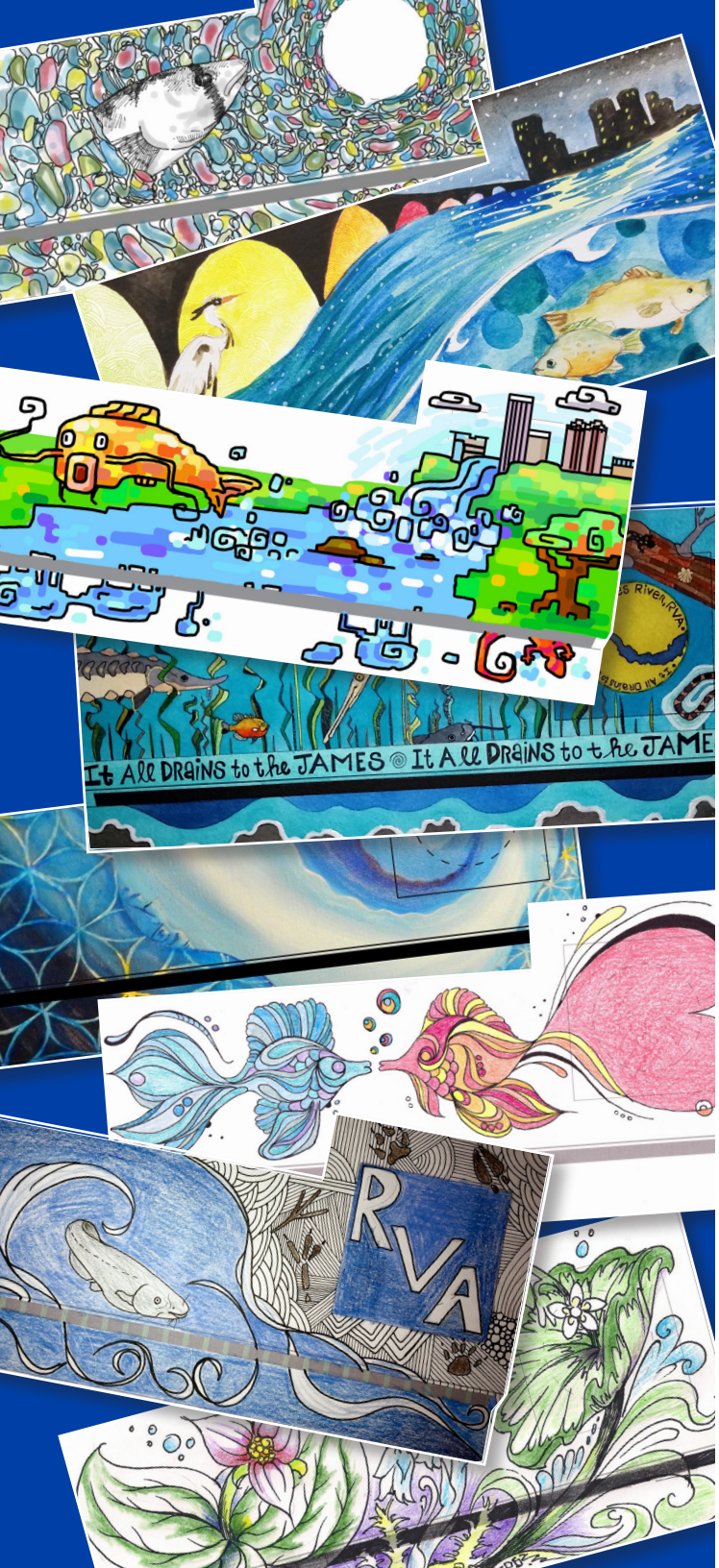


# GOVERNMENT APPROVALS

Before you can begin planning the launch of your Storm Drain Art Contest, you need to obtain the proper permits and approval from your city or county. These approvals may include:

- Department of Public Works
- Department of Public Utilities
- Communications Division
- Planning Commission
- Public Art Commission
- Department of Recreation and Parks
- Zoning Department
- Local County Administrator





## ARTIST SUBMISSIONS

In order to help our artists conceptualize within the right framework and regulations, we provided a list of submission guidelines on our website, including:

### When designing your artwork, you're encouraged to consider the following themes:

- Stormwater Pollution: "It All Drains to the James"
- Environmental Protection: The importance of cleaner water faster
- James River/Richmond Ecosystem: Local wildlife/habitat, natural beauty

### Designs must also adhere to the following criteria:

- Use the attached template to propose design concepts. Be mindful that some changes to your design may be required to accommodate the specific location.
- Each storm drain is made of concrete with a metal manhole cover on top. The shape of the drain is a stretched L. On average, the drains measure approximately 138" in length, 37" in width at the short end and 51" in width at the wider end. The lip of the drain where it connects to the street is approximately 8" high. You may paint into the street up to one foot beyond the lip. Please use the template as a guide.
- Designs must be painted on the area surrounding the drain and must run to or incorporate the drain.
- Designs may not contain any business promotions or advertisements.
- Designs may not include any breach of intellectual property, brands or trademarks, or depictions of illegal activity.
- Designs may not incorporate any physical objects attached to the drains.
- Designs must be public friendly.
- If the final design differs greatly from the proposed design, the City of Richmond reserves the right to remove the artwork.

We also included a downloadable pdf template outlining the average storm drain shape and size. Once artists completed their concepts, they could scan and submit it via our website using the 8.5x11 template in .pdf or .jpg format.

# COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

Throughout the duration of the Storm Drain Art Contest, we employed a variety of communication channels to encourage artist submissions and amplify public awareness.

## Website

We developed a Storm Drain Art landing page on the RVAH2O website with relevant contest information, including additional pages for:

- Contest Rules & Regulations
- Artist Submissions
- Downloadable Storm Drain Template
- Contact Page for Additional Questions

The landing page also included click-through icons linking to RVAH2O's Facebook, Twitter and YouTube social media accounts.



## Social Media & Public Engagement



**Facebook, Twitter & Instagram:**  
Used to share contest information and deadlines, promote Fan Favorite voting, and link to media coverage



**YouTube:**  
Used to feature videos of artists painting their storm drains



## FAN FAVORITE “RVA CHOICE” AWARD:

To further engage the public, we created a Fan Favorite “RVA CHOICE” Award that we promoted heavily through social media outlets like Instagram. The public could view the top five designs and vote for their favorite via an online voting portal.

# PRESS COVERAGE

The objective of our Public Relations strategy was to secure participation from local artists and Richmond residents and to drive consumer interest in the painted stormwater drains as a Richmond art and tourist attraction. Most importantly, we wanted to reach at least 20 percent of Richmond residents with a stormwater and clean water quality message.

## Our PR Approach:

We incorporated a variety of media relations and social media tactics to raise awareness of the RVAH2O Storm Drain Art Contest, including:

- Written news releases for important contest announcements
- Fact sheet on the Storm Drain Art Contest
- Fact sheet with short bios on selected artists, proposed designs and drain locations
- Engagement and education of Richmond residents, artists, art associations and galleries, and conservation and recreational groups through social media
- Social media posts to drive followers to RVAH2O.org, where they could enter the contest, vote for their “Fan Favorite” or obtain educational information

## PR Opportunities for News Coverage:

We identified three key opportunities to generate news coverage for the RVAH2O Storm Drain Art Project:

1. The “Call for Artists”
2. The “Five Artists Selected” winners announcement
3. The “Grand Reveal” event announcement

For each of these steps, we reached out to the media with press releases and obtained coverage across a wide variety of outlets, including newspaper and website articles.



# IMPLEMENTATION

From providing eco-friendly paint to preparing the drains for the artists, attending to details is an important part of successfully implementing a Storm Drain Art Contest. Check out a few of our tips and recommendations for making everything run as smoothly as possible!

## PAINT DAY LOGISTICS TIPS

### Location:

Storm drain locations should be within walking distance of each other, if possible, for ease of distributing supplies and checking in with artists.

### Artists:

Artists typically require two to three days for painting, but not necessarily consecutively, so allow sufficient time for completion.

### Department of Public Utilities

#### Communications Team:

Representatives need to be available to supply daily support in person and via mobile phone, and to distribute drinking water, water for mixing paints and art supplies.

### Department of Public Works:

Representatives should provide and set up cones, tents to protect participants from the sun, “Do Not Enter” ribbons and Drain Buddies to protect each drain. DPW representatives should pick up tents daily, but leave cones, ribbon and Drain Buddies.

## PAINTING SUPPLIES

Provide paint in primary colors: red, blue, yellow, white and black. Artists are responsible for mixing base colors to achieve their desired palette. All paint should be slip proof, pavement friendly and environmentally safe.

Additional painting supplies should be provided to each artist:

- 2 gallons of water for drinking and painting

- A large bucket filled with smaller buckets of each paint color
- Small paint mixing buckets
- Basic brushes
- Basic cloths

We recommend Sherwin Williams® ArmorSeal for the colored paint and Seal-Krete® for the clear seal paint protectant.

Prior to artists’ arrival, clear the drains of dirt and debris and apply a coat of clear seal paint to the raw concrete and metal of the drain, as well as to the pavement at street level (we recommend applying up to one foot from the drain opening to allow for continuing the design into the street).

Once the drain has been painted, protect the art with a coat of clear seal paint protectant.



## OUTCOMES

The first year of the Storm Drain Art Project was a resounding success. Not only did we meet the City of Richmond's permit requirement of reaching 20 percent of Richmond residents with an important water quality message - we also won a 2017 National Environmental Achievement Award from the National Association of Clean Water Agencies (NACWA).



Most importantly, we successfully integrated art and creativity into an effective environmental awareness campaign. We educated the community about storm drains and clean water in a fun and engaging way - with many people telling us they couldn't wait for next year's Storm Drain Art Contest!

Your community can do it, too. Take advantage of the tips in our How-To Guide and you'll be well on your way to a successful Storm Drain Art Contest!

**For additional information, visit [RVAH2O.org](http://RVAH2O.org) or contact Jonét Prévost-White, Water Resources Division, at [Jonet.Prevost-White@richmondgov.com](mailto:Jonet.Prevost-White@richmondgov.com), Tel. 804-646-6964.**

