

Eco-Mural Arts Trail along the Great Barrier Reef

Baria Guardians

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Abstract

An eco-mural arts trail campaign along the Great Barrier Reef will raise awareness on the top five critical issues the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority defined in their 2019 outlook report. Through a literature review, the best practices for the message, art form and location were explored along with an analysis of social media hashtags to find recommendations for tagging artworks. The literature review showed that participatory artworks are the most effective form for engaging viewers, increasing emotional affinity with nature and sharing the murals on social media. The idea of placemaking was also found to be important in determining the locations for higher engagement. The analysis showed the integrated use of specific place, art, conservation, reef and tourism hashtags would increase awareness on social media. Signage, the inclusion of indigenous artists and funding were also considerations of the campaign. These recommendations were provided as a guide for best practices to make the #LoveTheReefArtTrail successful.

Introduction

The Great Barrier Reef [GBR] eco-arts trail will raise awareness around the critical issues the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority [GBRMPA] is addressing to support the health and conservation of the World Heritage site while highlighting ReefHQ and Reef Guardian partners' efforts. It will embrace the connection between science and the arts to engage audiences. While the relationship between the arts and science are often overlooked in the present day, compelling examples date back to antiquity highlighting how science and mathematics has shaped architecture, inspired designs, influenced paintings and transformed the performing arts (Strosberg, 2001). This arts and science connection will be brought together for a common purpose, including improving general awareness of issues and public campaigns, aiding community development, reinforcing values and beliefs and building an environmentally sustainable culture (Curtis, 2011).

The eco-arts trail will offer a tourist path through local towns and council districts stopping at eye-catching and engaging ecologically-focused community murals, sculptures or artworks. The Australian Silo Art Trail (Figure 1) is a functioning arts trail where silos and water towers that were a town eyesore are transformed into aesthetically engaging artworks that increased tourism in Regional Australia (Green & Green, 2017). Over the past 30 years, community murals have become collaborative endeavours as they focus on hiring local artists and involving residents (Conrad, 1995). This campaign will empower local communities to create a series of eco-murals in



Figure 1: Australian Silo Art Trail in Grenfell, NSW (from Gard, n.d.).

public spaces that bring awareness to the issues threatening the reef. Eco-murals generate increased interest in environmental concerns, assist in developing solutions and help strengthen communities (Ulbricht, 1998). They also invite spectators to ‘see, feel, experience and commit to’ the need for environmental action (Desai & Chalmers, 2007). They provide moments of engagement for tourists and locals alike.

This campaign will focus on community engagement and communicating local understandings to a global audience. To achieve our desired impact, we have determined there are three main focuses that require further investigation: message and art form, the location of the artworks, and social media sharing.

Message and Art Form

Methods

To ensure our eco-arts campaign captures an audience, we need to consider the principles of artistic form and engagement, so each artwork communicates the ecological messages for the GBR effectively. Through a literature analysis, we will be able to understand the effective communication practices and art principles that could be utilised to make an eco-arts trail impactful.

Findings

It is crucial each mural on the eco-mural trail contains positive messages as unfavourable depictions can result in denial and distancing from the issue (Burke et al., 2018). Creating images that inspire hope and include a call to action will give the public an idea of what they can do to help and protect them against feeling vulnerable in a doomed world (Michael, 2000).

Eco-murals generate increased interest in environmental concerns, assist in developing solutions and help strengthen communities (Kang Song & Gammel, 2011). These murals will cause locals and tourists alike to build empathy and emotional affinity to nature through viewing art, which is a powerful indicator of pro-environmental behaviours (Curtis, 2009) (Figure 2). Keeping individuals engaged is a primary goal, and these murals, whether they are viewed in person or on social media platforms, will continue to be a reminder for everyone (Desai & Chalmers, 2007).

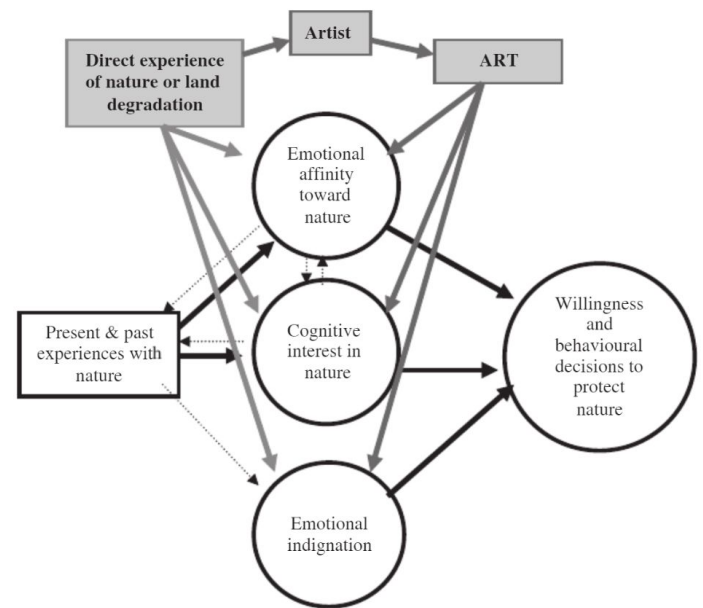


Figure 2: Model to show how the arts affect environmental behaviour by increasing an emotional affinity towards nature (from Curtis, 2009).

The arts and science connection means that artists may need to collaborate with scientists to ensure scientific credibility. Using arts allows scientists and artists to change people's behaviour through expressing feelings, have people reevaluate their behavioural decision-making and combine a synthesis of the environmental issue (Curtis, 2011; Curtis, 2009). This is where GBRMPA and ReefHQ could provide additional input to each artwork.

These artworks must communicate about challenges facing the GBR to help build the connection of tourists and local community members to action. The major threats to the GBR that have been identified by GBRMPA in their 2019 outlook report are "climate change, coastal development, land-based run-off, and direct human use (such as illegal fishing)." (GBRMPA, 2019a; Project Dragonfly, 2020). For the impact to be higher in the community, the suggestion is that the mural represents local perspectives on these issues.

Research shows that participatory artworks are the most effective form for engaging and having an audience share the murals on social media. Participatory artworks are not complete until the viewer interacts with them (Burke et al., 2018). This causes individuals to be excited about the experience of interacting with the art. As a consequence, people want to share this experience on social media (Chatzichristodoulou, 2013). Participatory art gives a voice to the public, especially individuals who would otherwise be ignored or disregarded (Finley, 2003). A successful example of using participatory art is the murals by the artist Kelsey Montague who painted angel wings for people to pose in front of and quickly went viral beginning the #WhatLiftsYou movement (Decker, 2017). Using participatory art will increase audience engagement and emotional affinity for the GBR.

Location

Methods

Adding a mural to public space has the potential to enhance the location's aesthetic, so defining the area for each eco-artwork along the trail is a vital consideration for us to refine. We hope to see not only local but also global communities involved in this campaign, but our focus should be on situating the artwork trail in the GBR region. Through a literature analysis, we will make suggestions about criteria for locations to display these murals based on their proximity to the reef and popular tourist destinations.

Findings

Eighteen local governments in the region are members of GBRMPA's Reef Guardian Council program which spans approximately 1400 km from the southernmost council of Bundaberg to the northernmost in Cairns (GBRMPA, 2020c; GBRMPA & Reef Guardian

Councils, 2018). All eighteen districts should be offered the opportunity to participate in the eco-mural trail campaign.

Research shows best practises for the locations of artworks are in places where ‘people come to visit, study, play, congregate and discuss matters that may relate to the content of the mural’ (Kang Song & Gammel, 2011). Having a public space available for individuals to socialise is vital to each individual's social and psychological health as well as the health for the community as a whole (Nguyen et al., 2019). Businesses that back up to popular public spaces allow the murals to be on full display and gain the most attention (Kang Song & Gammel, 2011). Adding these murals in popular locations known for amassing crowds will help bring awareness to the eco-mural and emotional affinity. With almost 2.1 million visitors travelling to the GBR each year (GBRMPA, 2019b), these eco-murals could potentially be seen and geo-tagged by millions of people.

When choosing a location for each artwork, we would recommend to the councils to consider the idea of ‘placemaking’. The Project for Public Spaces (2016) suggests that in order to create a great place, in addition to being social, the following must be present: a site that is easily accessible and connected to other areas, a place that encourages participation from the people that are visiting, and a place that is warm, safe, and restful. Keeping these criteria in mind, the councils should find an area in their town that currently or potentially meets these conditions. Community members in each region should help determine the best location for the mural as they are the experts in knowing where the places are in the community that are “comfortable, sociable, easily accessible, and fun” (Project for Public Spaces, 2016).

Social Media

Methods

All of the social media platforms currently used by GBRMPA and ReefHQ allow users to add hashtags, a creation initially from Twitter, to their posts and uploads (Facebook, 2020; Twitter, 2020; Instagram, 2020; YouTube, 2020). GBRMPA even promotes the use of #LovetheReef across the top navigation bar of their website (GBRMPA, 2020a). This campaign can utilise the power of hashtags to expand the reach of eco-arts trail. Social media platforms have shifted to predominately being a visually-orientated experience to enable average internet users to share their experiences and opinions online (Li & Xie, 2020). Many of these posts are labelled with hashtags which allow social media marketing to use them functionally to inspire users to engage in ‘trendsetting’ behaviours (Rauschnabel et al., 2019). People can click or search the hashtag to find posts about topics that interest them (Facebook, 2020; YouTube, 2020), which is where broader engagement in the artworks can be achieved. To provide a considered approach to the hashtags advice, we collected data from Instagram over five weeks. Hashtags were identified through extensive searching of accounts or posts related to the GBR and our partners’ priorities and exploring additional tags that they may be using. A list of location, reef, arts, conservation, and tourism hashtags were examined to gain an understanding from a range of perspectives. Each week we searched every hashtag and recorded the number of publicly-accessible posts on Instagram that were tagged with that code. This data collection allowed us to evaluate the frequency they are used across the globe. Our approach with the data was to use the discoveries to provide recommendations of the hashtag or multiple hashtags to include at each artwork.

Results

In our analysis of most used hashtags about the topics of art, Australia, conservation and the Great Barrier Reef, we have found that there are popular hashtags that would promote our murals on social media to a greater extent. Based on what we discovered so far, we suggest that each mural will have 4 to 5 hashtags associated with it. The first hashtag will be place-based (i.e. #Townsville, #Mackay, #Cairns); many of which are already being used frequently. The second hashtag that will be used will be #greatbarrierreef which was the most common hashtag used along the Great Barrier Reef (Figure 3). GBRMPA's current hashtag #LovetheReef isn't used as often as #greatbarrierreef, so this may be an additional consideration for our partners. The reference #GBR, while used heavily on Instagram and had some posts relevant to the Reef, was mostly about other uncomplimentary focuses, so we would suggest avoiding this where possible. The third hashtag suggested is art-related. The most commonly used hashtags we found that were art-related were #publicart and #muralart. Either of these would be a good fit to use for this eco-mural art trail (Figure 4). A fourth hashtag considered is a conservation-based hashtag. This hashtag will vary based on the content of the mural. Potential labels could include #climatechange, #conservation and #savetheplanet (Figure 5). The final hashtag is one that is quite popular along the Great Barrier Reef for tourism promotion, #thisisqueensland. This hashtag highlights the state of Queensland, including the local councils along the GBR.

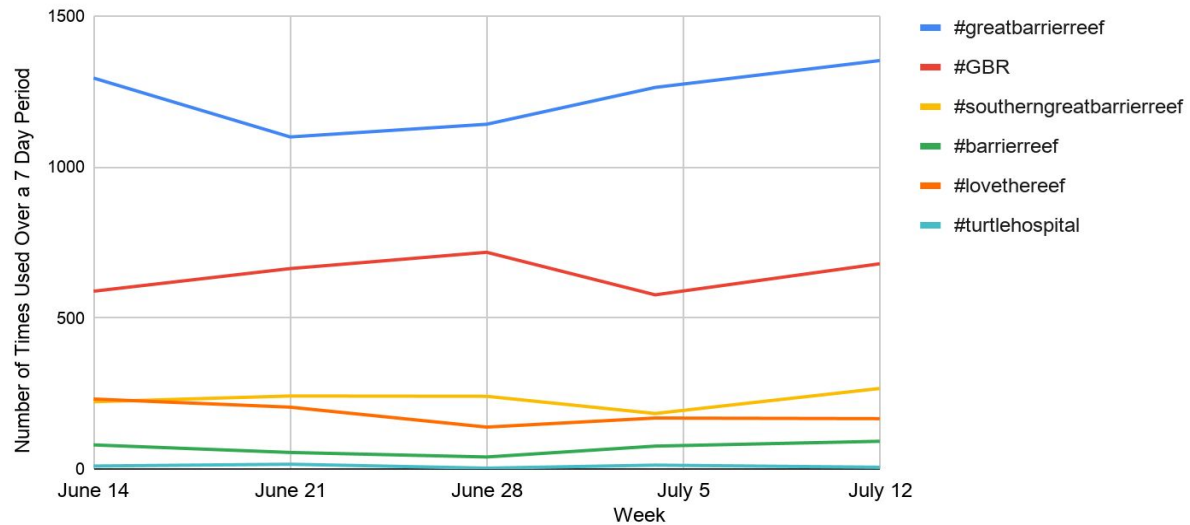


Figure 3 : Frequency of GBR Related Hashtag Use Per Week Over a 5-week Period on Instagram

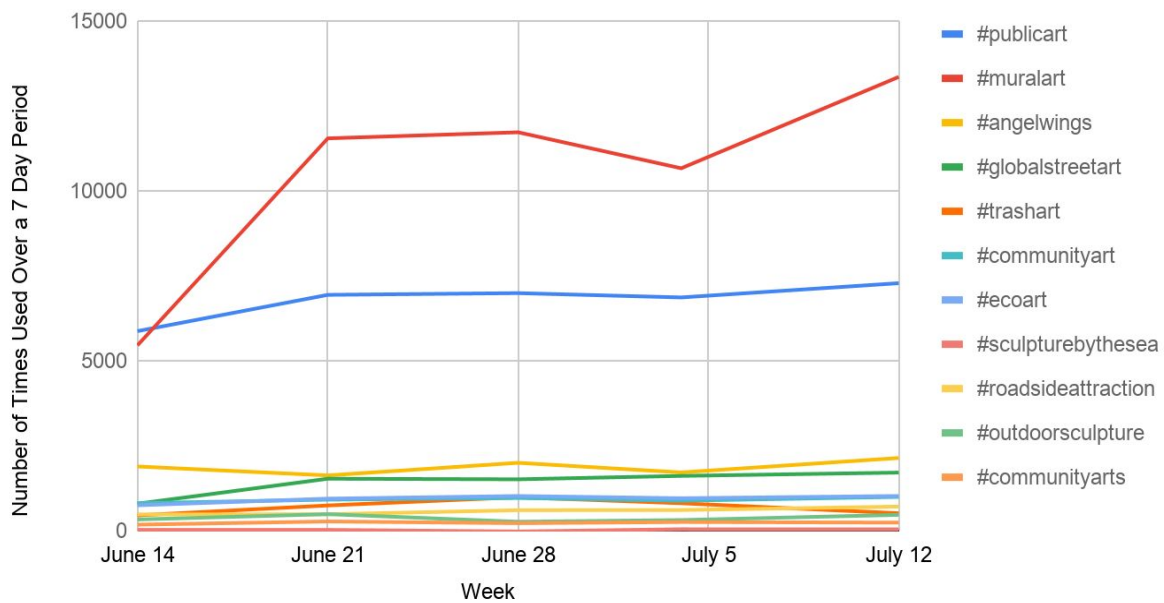


Figure 4: Frequency of Art Related Hashtag Use Per Week Over a 5-week Period on Instagram

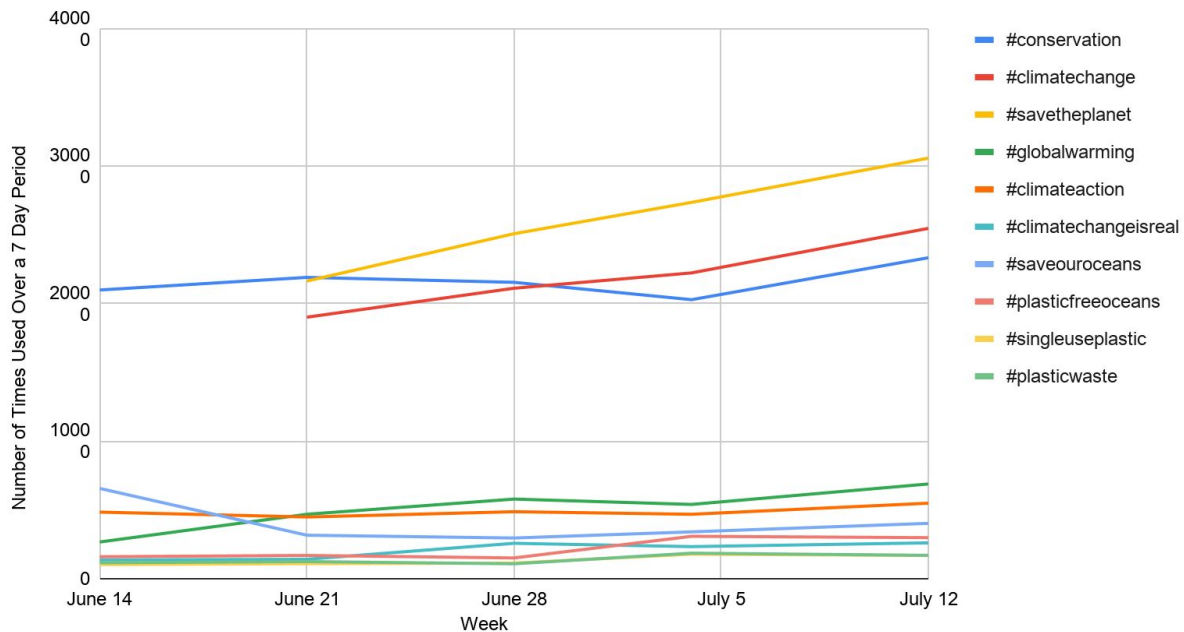


Figure 5: Frequency of Conservation Related Hashtag Use Per Week Over a 5-week Period on Instagram

Discussion

If we use these findings around the location, artistic form and social media as recommended practice for the basis of decision making for the eco-arts trail then we increase the ability to raise awareness and emotional affinity to challenges faced by the GBR. These areas are intertwined and, when considered together, there are social, educational and conservation benefits for the GBR and its communities.

The final location of each artwork, when carefully selected, could potentially increase tourism to their area by creating a place that is interesting to tourists and local community members alike. Consequently, this brings additional economic benefits to the regional communities. Each participatory eco-mural on the art trail will be unique to the location and the artist creating, which will then be shared through social media and increase publicity to both the artist and the GBR.

Small road signs could provide directions to aid tourists in finding the murals. The use of signage at each artwork to briefly describe the artwork and its purpose can also offer an action that viewers can take. A QR code for viewers to scan can take them to the GBRMPA or ReefHQ websites with additional information about the artwork, conservation message and the artist who created it. Providing an additional opportunity for viewers to then donate to the ReefHQ turtle hospital would be a small action the viewer can take while there.

The eco-mural artworks themselves could contain the place, conservation, art, tourism and reef hashtags for social media as part of the artwork, so people are more likely to tag them when posting. In addition to the previous hashtags discussed, the art trail can build on ReefHQ and GBRMPA's use of #lovethereef hashtag to use #LoveTheReefArtTrail. Tourists who are following the route can then connect each artwork as part of an overall image of the reef, consequently increasing their emotional affinity and understanding of place.

In addition to the items discussed above, there are suggestions that artistic talent is also considerations for the success of the #LoveTheReefArtTrail. The involvement of local community artists in the design, creation and communication of environmental stewardship messages in the artworks will enhance the connections to the region. Many regional areas have hidden artistic talents and craftspeople that can provide unique perspectives and visions for an eco-trail project like this. Local decision-makers should be encouraged to engage First Nations Australian artists where possible as they have a strong affiliation with the lands and waters of the region. GBRMPA works with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander [ATSI] community to support their ongoing social, cultural, economic and spiritual connections as the traditional owners of the region, and they value the conservation knowledge for the biodiversity and resilience of the reef that they have handed down through generations

(GBRMPA, 2020b). Our suggestion is for the GBRMPA's Reef Guardian partners to prioritise selecting an artist from their community who has both a connection to the GBR and to their local community.

A range of approaches to engage local artists in the campaign should be considered. This includes approaching arts associations, visit local studios, researching local artists in the area, exploring social media posts in the region, contacting school art programs or Reef Guardian Schools, holding a competition, or Arts Connect Inc. Connecting with indigenous artists could occur through local elders, local indigenous art centres like Ghost Nets Australia, or use ATSI cultural events in the region like the Cairns Indigenous Art Fair (Ghost Nets Australia, 2020; Tourism Tropical North Queensland, 2020). Conversations with potential artists about artistic intent are vital to selecting an appropriate artist (Gilfillon & Morrow, 2014). These discussions may highlight shared ideals like environmentally-based arts and cultural practices, sustainable craftsmanship, use of materials retrieved from the reef or established social media presence. Our investigations identified artists like David Day, Tracey & Goldenberg, Alison McDonald, and Llani along with arts venues/groups like Whitsundays Arts Festival, Public Galleries of Queensland or Great Barrier Reef Festival (Kesteven, 2016; Crossen, 2018; Tapiolas & Kesteven, 2016; Williams, n.d.; Whitsunday Arts Festival, 2020; PGQ, n.d.; Tourism & Events Queensland, 2020). There is no shortage of local talent available to the Reef Guardian partners.

Funding for the project should also be considered. We have discovered there are options for funding of arts, environmental and scientific campaigns, particularly in Australia, and by taking an arts approach to this campaign makes this campaign eligible for more funding grants, as does the use of ATSI artists. Financial assistance for arts campaigns in Australia

includes those from government organisations like Australia Council of the Arts (Gilfillan & Morrow, 2014). A table of potential funding contributors and grants, the focus of the grant and eligibility criteria to provide our partner is in Appendix 1. Gilfillan & Morrow (2014) suggest that it is important, for the artists' sake, to consider the motivations behind different funding sources and what the intention of the financial offering is trying to achieve. This would also be a factor for our conservation partners, so we will ensure we consider the reputation and situation behind granting organisations. Having clarity around the artistic idea of the artworks is a crucial requirement of funding applications (Gilfillan & Morrow, 2014) and image characteristics and presence are critical to the social media sharing (Li & Xie, 2020).

Table 1: Summary of the recommended criterion for the GBR eco-mural trail

Location	Social Media	Art Form and Message
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Offer to Reef Guardian Councils or volunteer locations. ● Allow Councils to decide location based on their knowledge but with recommendations of the site should be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Social ○ Easily accessible and connected to other places ○ Space for participation ○ Warm, safe and restful ○ Visible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 4-5 Hashtags with each artwork <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Artwork Location ○ #greatbarrierreef ○ #publicart or #muralart ○ The message of the artwork ○ #thisisqueensland ● Using #LoveTheReefArtTrail as a label for the trail ● Also, encourage tagging the Instagram handles of our partners. ● Display the tags with the artworks and if possible on the artwork boundary so it may be captured in images. ● Apply these hashtags on other social media channels and not just on Instagram. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Participatory artwork that must have an element of interactivity so not complete until the viewer is involved. ● Clear image characteristics so it can be easily identifiable online and in-person. ● Focused message on the challenges faced by GBR (climate change, etc.) at a local perspective. ● The theme of artwork should be a collaborative decision between location and artists. ● Partnerships with scientists may be required for the credibility of the content. ● Encourage sustainable craftsmanship and environmentally based practices and materials. ● Signage with information about the artwork could link to partner websites or a trail website through QR code creating an action for viewers to take
Funding	Engaging Artists	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Numerous governmental and regional grants available ● ATSI artists eligible for additional funding options ● Ensure funding sources are credible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Allow Reef Guardian Councils or Volunteer locations to select an artist. ● Local artist for a regional perspective ● First Nations (ATSI) artists encouraged ● Ensure conversations with artists about artistic intent before finalising partnership to ensure shared perspectives. 	

The proposed recommendations for the #LoveTheReefArtTrail narrowed down our discoveries into suggested criteria for success based on our findings (Table 1). Items around artist choice and funding are a guide and suggestion as they may alter based on local community decisions.

Conclusion

The #LoveTheReefArtTrail has the potential to impact and benefit on a local and global scale. The top five threats facing the GBR can be highlighted while also showcasing the work of the GBRMPA and ReefHQ. Participatory artwork is the most effective form for engaging viewers as it increases their emotional affinity with nature. The idea of placemaking was also found to be important in determining the locations for higher engagement. Regional councils and select local artists, including indigenous artists, will be supported through increased exposure and notoriety. The analysis of hashtag data revealed that the eco-art murals would benefit from a variety of hashtags. Suggested signage was discussed to lead visitors to the GBRMPA and ReefHQ organisations as well as assist visitors in locating the artwork. Grants were researched and charted so that local councils could select the appropriate funding and begin the process. These recommendations were provided as a guide for best practices to make the #LoveTheReefArtTrail successful.

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Appendix 1: Available grants that could be suitable for this project

*This summary has been created with the understanding that some funding programs are cancelled or modified due to COVID-19 and their websites may not display all the regular information.

Funding organisation	Grant Title	Financial Contribution	Due Date	ATSI only	Eligibility	Other details
Australia Council for the Arts	Signature Works	\$35,000	February 2020	✓	By invitation only	Signature work that provides a First Nation artist with a chance to be exposed to the national and international arts landscape.
Australia Council for the Arts	The Dreaming Award	\$20,000	November 2019	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> First nations artist Aged 18-30 All artforms 	Support for inspiring young First Nations artists to produce a major body of work through mentoring and partnerships.
Queensland Government	Queensland Arts Showcase Program	Maximum \$120,000	Rolling Fund		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public presentations of new works Develop an art and cultural experience for Queensland communities and cultural tourism 	Investing in Queensland arts/cultural connections nationally and internationally by supporting artistic and non-creative collaborations.
Queensland Government	Individuals Fund	Up to \$10,000	Round 1: April 2020 Round 2: TBA		Emerging and established artists and cultural workers	Professional and career development opportunities for artists that provide significant opportunities
artsQueensland	Regional Arts Development Fund	Up to \$100,000 depending on the population	April 2020		In partnership with local council areas which also provide financial or in-kind funding	Projects are judged against the criterion of Quality, Reach, Impact and Viability.
artsQueensland	Indigenous Regional Arts Development Fund	\$25,000	February 2020	✓	An indigenous local government area	Arts and Cultural Activities that support cultural maintenance and arts development
Australia Council for the Arts	Individuals and Groups	\$10,000 to \$50,000	February 2020		Australian artist or arts worker with Australian citizenship/ permanent resident	For projects that gain wider audiences on national and international scales.
Australian Government (through Flying Arts Alliance)	Regional Arts Fund (RAF)	Up to \$30,000	February 2020		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regionally located individuals, groups, incorporated not-for-profit organisations and councils Have at least some income from other funding sources 	Supports regional and remote Australians with access to and participation in arts and culture, including sustainable economic, social and cultural development
GBRMPA	Reef Guardian Stewardship Grant	\$1,000-\$6,000	October 2019		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Must undertake the project in the GBRMPA area Be a bonafide not-for-profit, government or ATSI organisation Connection to the annual theme 	GBRMPA's investment in people being part of the solution to the reef with the objective of fostering community stewardship of the reef. Also, to influence social and environmental drivers that affect the reach and its local communities.
Advance Queensland	Engaging Science Grants	Up to \$10,000	November 2019		Address either public awareness, scientist engagement, civic engagement or STEM participation	For the delivery and engagement of communication by scientists, researchers, science communicators, journalists, teachers, organisations and community groups.
Foundation for National Parks & Wildlife	Community Conservation Grants	\$10,000	TBA		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Federal/State National Park agency, or; Agency working with a National Park, or; Individuals, or; Not-for-profit or For-profit organisations 	Grants for conservation projects to assist in the protection of native species, habitats, landscapes and cultural heritage. Funding for projects around Land and water, Threatened Species, Cultural Heritage and Parks for People.
Ian Potter Foundation	Sustainable - Environment	\$100,000+	Currently by invitation due to COVID-19		Deductible Gift Recipient Item 1 and Tax Concession Charity Status	Investing in Australia's research and innovation capacity and community-driven environmental initiatives. Support initiatives that seek to improve natural resource management, and preserve biodiversity/ ecosystems facing a range of ecological challenges, including climate change.