



Making Great Art Work:

Festivals Policy & Strategy 2018

General Description and Context

Festivals are key producers and presenters of the arts in Ireland and are essential for engaging large and diverse audiences. The Arts Council acknowledges the rich variety of artform practice areas presented by festivals and their critical role in broadening public access to the arts. Festivals are often central to a community expressing and exploring its local identity, in providing access to the arts in areas of low engagement, and in providing significant opportunities for artists to develop their practice. Festivals play a dynamic and strategic role in the overall arts ecology in Ireland and in the broader arenas of cultural tourism, community development and urban regeneration.

Central to the importance of festivals is the unique opportunities they provide for presenting and experiencing art. Inherent in the festival form is the permission to experiment – a permission to cross thresholds that might be closed or forbidding throughout the rest of the year – as well as a flexibility to respond to both urban and rural landscapes, and an opportunity to engage with communities. As such, festivals are an indispensable platform that afford artists a space to innovate and invite audiences to experience work in different ways.

The Arts Council's role is to advocate for a diverse and varied arts-festival ecology, and to provide a chain of funding supports that encourage models of national and international significance and best practice – i.e. models that increase opportunities for public engagement and participation in the arts or develop the work of an artist/artform. In addition, the Arts Council offers support to small festivals to deliver quality arts experiences for audiences, and prioritises programmes engaged with, and relevant to, local communities.

In [Making Great Art Work](#) (MGAW), the Arts Council identifies two policy priority areas: [the artist](#) and [public engagement](#). In delivering on these priority areas in festivals, the Council will take the following approach over the next three years.

Artists & Festivals

The Arts Council supports artists indirectly by the provision of funding to a broad range of festival models to create a varied and resilient festival infrastructure in which artists can avail of commissioning, presenting and co-producing opportunities, incubate and test new work, discover new environments that provide opportunities for experimentation, and gain exposure to new audiences.

In particular, festivals are at the forefront of incubating street and spectacle arts in Ireland and central to its continued growth and development, and in providing a necessary environment for street and spectacle artists to test, foster and present work to audiences.

Festivals are recognised by the Arts Council as providing an environment for creative risk-taking, concentrated and critical appraisal of work, peer networking, and mentoring and exposure to national and international work of calibre, all of which can contribute to an artist's professional-skill development.

Through its [Strategic Funding](#), the Arts Council supports the essential infrastructure required to sustain and develop festival practice in Ireland. This spans a broad range of artform practice areas. The Council's [Arts Grant Funding](#) supports the development of festival programmes. In this regard the Arts Council values not only the development of single-artform practice but also the approach of multidisciplinary arts models in festivals. Through its [Open Call](#) programme the Arts Council supports large, ambitious, new projects providing an environment for creative risk-taking in a festival context.

In further supporting artists, over the next three years the Arts Council will:

- Develop an incentivised pilot scheme for festivals to host artistic residencies across the country.
- Incentivise festivals through the [Festival Investment Scheme](#) to provide more opportunities for local artists.
- Provide increased support to street-and-spectacle arts.
- Further our own understanding of interdisciplinary arts practice and its impact on festival making.

Public Engagement & Festivals

Festivals play a significant role (often due to their use of public space and types of engagement) in providing the public with new arts experiences. The Arts Council acknowledges the importance of this provision, and understands that festivals are often a gateway to introducing arts activity to the public for the first time. In terms of public engagement, 'The Arts Council champions diversified approaches through audience growth and development and the creation of opportunities for the public to engage in the arts as participants, artistic collaborators and volunteers.' In this regard the Arts Council values and champions the contribution of amateur and voluntary participation in festival practice.

In the area of public engagement, the Arts Council interest is articulated through festival policy in three areas: audiences, participation and volunteering.

AUDIENCES

There is limited understanding of festival audience behaviours, trends and benchmarking. The measurement of such activity would provide intelligence to festivals that would be useful for developing accurate and appropriate audience-development strategies.

PARTICIPATION

There are opportunities for festivals to build their public engagement capacity and develop different models and more dynamic approaches to public engagement, including participatory, collaborative and socially engaged arts practices.

VOLUNTEERING

The measurement and benchmarking of festival resources is currently limited and would benefit from further investigation to assess the potential vulnerability/resilience of the sector and the benefits of its social capital. An investment in the voluntary sector would help to further sustain the festival ecology in Ireland.

The support to festivals through the Arts Council's [Strategic Funding](#) and [Arts Grant Funding](#) programmes provides for the development of a broad range of audiences for the arts. The Arts Council's support to small festivals through the [Festival Investment Scheme](#) provides for increased participation in the arts. Together the suite of funding supports provides for a rich and varied ecology of opportunities for the public to access arts provision. Through the work of these organisations the public is given access to a diverse range of arts activity that otherwise would not be available to it.

In further developing public engagement, over the next three years the Arts Council will:

- Commit to a festivals-specific audience benchmarking, trends and behaviours study.
- Introduce festival priorities to the Festival Investment Scheme that strengthen the requirement for increased public engagement and different models of practice.
- Conduct a study of benefit-in-kind and volunteerism to better understand festival infrastructure and the use of social capital.
- Explore, with the Arts Participation team at the Arts Council and external agencies, best practice models of public engagement and participatory and collaborative arts practices, and how these are relevant to the development of the festival sector.
- Develop capacity-building supports in volunteerism with a commitment to operating best practice in this area.

Specific Festival Development Areas

A range of other issues of particular strategic relevance to festivals have an impact on the wider ecology for artists and audiences.

Findings from the 2017 Festival and Events Scheme Review identify deficits in the current funding ecology and resource supports for festivals. Despite smaller festivals having significant organisational resilience, there is an opportunity for these festivals to build capacity. In this regard, the Arts Council would be best placed to increase financial investment and to advance knowledge and skill sharing.

To address this, over the next three years the Arts Council will:

- Ensure there is a funding mechanism suitable for festivals that matches the different stages of their development.
- Provide opportunities for organisations to lever other supports to assist and build capacity in specific policy areas.

- Explore the establishment of a multi-agency approach to assist festivals in building their skills and improve their practice.
- Commission and develop a toolkit for festivals to provide best-practice approaches, guidance and practical supports.
- Increase its financial commitment to small festivals and encourage their strategic development.

Other *MGAW* Areas of Strategic Interest for Festivals

In the area of spatial & demographic, over the next three years the Arts Council will:

- Invest in further geodata analysis of those festivals in receipt of financial support.
- Seek agreement (where appropriate) between the Arts Council and local authorities regarding specific targets in relation to strategic festival development.
- Develop through its [Festival Investment Scheme](#) a mechanism for prioritising festival arts delivered in geographic areas of low arts engagement.

In the area of young people, children & education, over the next three years the Arts Council will:

- Explore with the YPCE team at the Arts Council and third-party agencies best-practice methodologies for increasing and improving opportunities for young people to engage in festival programmes.
- Enable benchmarking research into young people's experience of festival programmes.

In the area of International, over the next three years the Arts Council will:

- Introduce supports to provide festival programmers the opportunity to visit and observe international work, and to learn from these exchanges as part of a broader provision of festival capacity building.