



ARTS COUNCIL OF NORTHERN IRELAND

Business Plan

2024–27

artscouncil-ni.org

Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Who we are | 2 |
| What we do | 4 |
| Strategic Context | 8 |
| Introduction | 10 |
| 2024-27 Business Plan Actions | 16 |
| Organisational objectives | 18 |
| Funding | 28 |
| <hr/> | |
| Appendix 1: Investment Schedule | 30 |
| Appendix 2: Resource allocation | 31 |
| Appendix 3: Our progress in FY23-24 | 32 |

Arts Council Northern Ireland is committed to making information available in large print, braille, audio, Easy Read and will endeavour to provide information in languages other than English as well as British and Irish sign language on request.

Who we are

Vision

A society where **all people** can experience a **thriving** arts sector that is **recognised** as **essential** to creativity, wellbeing and social and economic prosperity.

Mission

We **develop** and **champion** the arts in Northern Ireland through **investment** and **advocacy**.

Values

Expertise

We use our experience and expertise to support the arts sector in NI through investing, advocating and evidencing the impact of the sector.

Collaboration

We value our strong relationships with partners and their ability to enhance arts programmes across NI and beyond.

Inclusion

We recognise the importance of diversity in the arts sector and are committed to being inclusive and accessible to all.

Integrity

We are open, transparent, and fair in how we distribute public funding.

What we do¹

Our statutory

functions are to:

Develop and improve the knowledge, appreciation and practice of the arts – we produce strategic research and intelligence and work with partners in the cultural sector to advise the Department for Communities, Local Authorities and other bodies on matters relating to the arts. We also have strong international links in the UK and beyond.

Increase public access to and participation in the arts – we want to create an innovative, creative and diverse society where people can fulfil their potential and contribute fully to society.

Advise the Department and other government departments, local councils and other bodies on matters relating to the arts - We raise the profile of the arts in Northern Ireland. We're the national voice for the arts in Northern Ireland, promoting the quality, value and importance of the region's artists/arts organisations and the impact that they make.

To accomplish these functions, we:

Support and develop high-quality arts activity – we invest public funding to create opportunities for more people, from all backgrounds and communities, to enjoy and take part in the arts.

Distribute National Lottery funds – we're able to fund projects that develop new arts activity, supporting individuals, communities and organisations through applications to our National Lottery funding programmes.

Develop international opportunities in the arts – we have developed partnerships with cultural organisations such as the British Council and we work collaboratively with all the UK nations to promote Northern Ireland art internationally. We encourage international exchange and collaboration between artists and arts organisations.

Work collaboratively with stakeholders and the public – we ensure that our programmes of work deliver public benefit by seeking and listening to feedback through our formal consultations and open conversations.

Work across art forms – including community arts and education, circus and carnival, creative industries, drama, dance, festivals and venues, literature, music, opera, theatre, traditional arts, visual arts, craft and many more.

Foster innovation between the arts and the wider creative industries – by facilitating skills development and knowledge transfer in digital technology for the arts sector, encouraging collaboration, leveraging additional funding and expertise through key partners, and encouraging the creation of digital artwork to ensure the arts evolve with audiences.

Influence decision-makers - the arts take place in many different settings. They can have a dramatic impact on the quality of people's lives and the places in which they live and work. The arts are also frequently at the heart of initiatives for economic and social regeneration. Our job is to ensure that the contribution that the arts can make is recognised.

¹The Arts Council (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 (legislation.gov.uk)



Belfast-based Cahoots, specialising in creating magical theatre for young audiences, is the New York Times' 'Critic's Pick' for the Broadway staging of their production, 'The Vanishing Elephant'.

Strategic context

This business plan reflects the first three years of the Arts Council’s new ten-year strategic plan entitled “Championing the arts”² (see Table 1 for a summary of our strategic outcomes and priorities for this period). This strategy was developed in close collaboration with colleagues and partners³ to ensure it aligns with the needs and aspirations of the arts sector in Northern Ireland.

The supporting three-year business plans will set out how we aim to achieve the outcomes in our strategy. This allows us to take a flexible approach and respond to external challenges or opportunities over the next 10 years.⁴

Table 1 Ten-year strategic plan 2024-2034

Outcomes for the arts sector

Outcome 1: A more financially stable arts sector.

1. We will pursue an approach to investment in the arts that is long term and outcomes based.
2. We will generate more income for the arts.

Outcome 2: A sector that develops, looks after its people, and is more inclusive.

3. We will create the conditions to grow artistic talent and develop the wider arts workforce.
4. We will ensure that the arts sector in Northern Ireland is inclusive and reflects society.

Outcome 3: A sector that is better supported to develop through experimentation and innovation.

5. We will enable innovation and artistic risk taking in the arts sector.

Outcomes for society

Outcome 4: A sector that contributes to social and economic benefits and cares about the environment

6. We will support arts projects that address contemporary societal challenges.
7. We will support the sector and act as a catalyst to drive awareness, engagement and positive change in response to climate change.

Outcome 5: More people from all backgrounds can enjoy arts experiences.

8. We will invest in the arts sector to deepen, widen and diversify audiences and participants.

Outcome 6: A sector that is more valued across society and government.

9. We will work in partnership to demonstrate to policy makers, decision makers and peoples in Northern Ireland the positive impact of the arts.
10. We will work as an effective and efficient organisation.

² Our Strategy | Arts Council NI (artscouncil-ni.org)

³ Summary of engagement feedback during development | Arts Council NI (artscouncil-ni.org)

⁴ Currently, the NI Department of Finance allocate annual budgets to government Departments, who in turn, allocate annual budgets to Arm's Length Bodies. However, we have developed a three-year business plan that will be reviewed on an annual basis as part of our business planning process.

Introduction

Over the last five-year strategic framework, the sector faced significant challenges, including the lack of a functioning Executive, impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, a cost-of-living crisis, reduced government intervention, and increasing costs. Despite these challenges, the sector found innovative, flexible and creative ways of delivering.

Looking ahead, the Arts Council NI welcomes the work to bring forward a DfC Arts Policy as part of a Heritage, Culture and Creativity programme⁵ announced by Minister Lyons. The work of the Culture, Arts and Heritage Taskforce is being used to inform policy development⁶, and collaboration between the Arts Council NI, DfC, Local Authorities, other government bodies and the sector will be crucial in addressing strategic priorities. We look forward to working with Minister Lyons as this work advances to stabilise and transform the arts sector. We will formally review our Strategy and Business Plan once the Arts Policy is agreed, to ensure alignment of our work to the Policy.

This three-year business plan has been developed amidst a backdrop of uncertainty, characterised by a decline in government investment and the absence of a programme for government. In June 2023, we conducted an internal analysis that showed that an additional £23.11 million of investment from the exchequer was required to better meet our statutory functions, particularly in relation to increasing public access to and participation in the arts. This includes a capital needs assessment that we undertake each year to support business cases for further investment. We will continue to explore partnership opportunities within DfC, other public bodies and philanthropic organisations to boost our budget in these challenging circumstances.

We have worked to develop a robust and comprehensive business plan that considers the current financial constraints and seeks to maximise the impact of the resources we have available and change how we deliver support for the sector. Efforts will be made to engage with relevant stakeholders and highlight the importance of investing in the arts for the cultural, social, and economic well-being of Northern Ireland.

In the first three years of the new strategy, we will focus on conducting a comprehensive review end to end of our grant processes, launching a multi-annual investment programme for arts organisations, providing support for individual artists' mental health and wellbeing, and developing an advocacy web page to assist the sector and interested partners in advocating for the arts in Northern Ireland. Furthermore, we are dedicated to fostering a culture of continuous improvement and learning. Through ongoing evaluation and feedback mechanisms, we seek to refine our support mechanisms and ensure they remain responsive to the evolving needs of the sector.

The flexibility of the strategy allows us to adapt and support the NI Executive in achieving its desired outcomes. By addressing these priorities and fostering collaboration, we aim to create a vibrant and thriving arts sector in Northern Ireland.



'Agreement' by Owen McCafferty. A Lyric Theatre production in March 2023, marking the 25th anniversary of the signing of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement. Photo: Carrie Davenport Photography

Demand for funding

Reflecting on the previous three years⁷, the number of eligible applications⁸ across all programmes was 5,402. Due to the budget available, the level of applications the Arts Council invested in was 3,502, representing a 65% rate of all applications. This demonstrates a high demand across all programmes, particularly the National Lottery Support for Individual Artists that had a 44% award rate in 23-24, the Organisations Digital Evolution Award with a 46% award rate, and the Musical Instruments for Bands with only 19% of applications receiving investment (see Table 2).

⁵ Written Ministerial Statement - Department for Communities - Heritage, Culture and Creativity, a Strategic Approach to Protect, Support and Celebrate Our Culture, Heritage and the Arts ([niassembly.gov.uk](https://www.niassembly.gov.uk))

⁶ The Arts Council NI was a member of the CAH Taskforce that contributed to the report to inform the Department's strategy development for the culture, arts and heritage sectors. Investing in Creative Delivery – A report from the Culture, Arts & Heritage Strategy announce | Department for Communities ([communities-ni.gov.uk](https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk))

⁷ Using ACNI administrative data. COVID recovery funds have been excluded from analysis.

⁸ Eligible applications are used to assess demand as applications have passed eligibility checks.

Mayte Segura performs at ArtsEkta's Belfast Mela, Northern Ireland's largest multi-cultural festival. Photo: Carrie Davenport Photography



Table 2 - FY23-24 Programme demand⁹:

| Programme | Total Demand (n) | Total Demand (£) | Awarded (n) | Awarded (£) | % n awarded |
|--|------------------|-------------------|-------------|-------------------|-------------|
| Annual Funding Programme | 111 | 18,549,303 | 84 | 12,889,623 | 76% |
| Arts and Older People | 45 | 380,793 | 22 | 169,994 | 49% |
| Arts Development Fund | 3 | 113,830 | 3 | 113,830 | 100% |
| Commissioning Programme | 49 | 766,116 | 24 | 200,004 | 49% |
| Creative Schools Programme | 11 | 160,756 | 11 | 79,991 | 100% |
| Health & Safety Capital Programme | 46 | 1,350,774 | 45 | 749,994 | 98% |
| Individual Artists Digital Evolution Programme | 20 | 168,817 | 8 | 75,679 | 40% |
| Musical Instruments for Bands | 163 | 1,201,034 | 31 | 297,221 | 19% |
| Musical instruments for Individuals | 261 | 1,216,707 | 16 | 107,766 | 6% |
| Musical Instruments for Professional and Non-Professional Groups | 51 | 561,127 | 9 | 119,487 | 18% |
| National Lottery - Project Funding | 100 | 5,055,410 | 71 | 2,182,441 | 71% |
| Organisations Digital Evolution Awards | 13 | 128,878 | 6 | 59,005 | 46% |
| Other Grants | 1 | 1,100,500 | 1 | 1,100,500 | 100% |
| Rural Engagement Arts Programme | 93 | 769,894 | 62 | 396,478 | 67% |
| Support for Individuals Artist Programme (SIAP) | 793 | 3,764,936 | 346 | 1,325,907 | 44% |
| Small Grants Programme | 86 | 578,784 | 49 | 189,414 | 57% |
| YP and Wellbeing Arts Prog | 25 | 222,757 | 18 | 134,941 | 72% |
| Total | 1,871 | 36,090,416 | 806 | 20,133,270 | 43% |

⁹Data extracted Feb 2024 and updated May 2024. Includes awards not taken up.

Our People

At the Arts Council, our people are at the heart of the work we do. They are the driving force behind our success, and we are committed to supporting them. Our people have consistently demonstrated their dedication, creativity and resilience, and they have continued to support the sector through challenging times. We are committed to providing them with the resources, support and opportunities they need to thrive. We believe that by fostering a culture of creativity, collaboration and innovation, we can continue to support a vibrant arts sector that enriches the lives of all those who experience it.

Strategic Partnerships

To best contribute to the Programme for Government, the development of cross cutting partnerships is essential. We will continue to build our existing partnership with our Sponsor Department (DfC) which will be particularly important in the development of an Arts Policy as part of the Heritage, Culture and Creativity Programme.

We have also been working with stakeholders to ground relationships with the local authorities, ensuring the arts are integral to local Community Plans and local integrated arts strategies. Pioneering work has already been done in previous years highlighting the significant contribution the arts can make to urban renewal and regeneration, tackling inequalities and contributing to social cohesion.

The National Lottery

- Every week National Lottery players raise more than £30M for good causes.
- More than £47 billion has now been raised to support good causes since 1994.
- More than 670,000 projects have been supported with National Lottery funding, the equivalent of around 240 lottery grants in every UK postcode district.

May 2024

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland and An Chomhairle Ealaíon have been working together to develop the Arts for the past forty years. This cooperation takes many forms and typically includes an annual plenary session that receives reports from the joint North South Working Group. We will continue to work with An Chomhairle Ealaíon to develop areas of shared interest.

Building on our partnership with Tourism NI and the success of 'Embrace the Place', an animation of four key tourism sites across NI, we will continue strategic engagement with Tourism NI to unlock opportunities for the arts. We will also maintain our important relationships with The Baring Foundation, Public Health Agency, Education Authority, Arts Humanities Research Council, The British Council, Future Screens NI and The Executive Office on important arts programmes that strongly deliver against cross-departmental government outcomes.

The Arts Council also has long-standing relationships with the other Arts Councils in the UK, including:

- Joint working to promote the National Lottery Good Causes strategy with the National Lottery Promotions Unit,
- Continuing with agreed actions such as commissioning opportunities with the Performing Rights Society for composers from NI,
- Sharing intelligence about the impacts of the UK leaving the EU on our arts and cultural sector through the Four Nations Initiative and Arts Infopoint,
- Joint working on the Cultural Bridges programme to promote and strengthen artistic and cultural exchange with UK and Germany.



Hollie Hunter and Alison Smyth, members of Stage Beyond, a theatre company based in Derry-Londonderry for adults with learning disabilities

2024-27 Business Plan Actions

A Snapshot

| Sector: | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Financial Stability | 1) Invest in a multi-annual arts investment programme aligned to strategic outcomes that will run from Autumn FY24/25 – Autumn FY26/27 |
| | 2) Develop a set of investment principles for all investments for 2024-2027 |
| | 3) Develop an outcomes framework and collect, analyse and present insights annually to demonstrate impacts of our investment |
| | 4) Maintain and build strategic partnerships to boost income and networks to the sector throughout 2024-2027 |
| | 5) Undertake a scoping exercise to assess how the Arts Council can generate more income for the sector (opportunities across private, public and philanthropic funders) by Autumn 2025 |
| Workforce Development | 6) Review, design and open Support for Individuals Artist Programme (SIAP) and encourage applications from emerging artists |
| | 7) Explore a pilot mentoring scheme in FY24/25 within the Support for Individual Artist Programme and ringfence support for emerging artists |
| | 8) Invest in a three-year programme to support artists' wellbeing and mental health and launch in Spring 2024 |
| | 9) Generate international opportunities for artists and organisations |
| | 10) Refresh existing deliberative forums for rural and global majority/minority ethnic artists |
| | 11) Provide ongoing support for D/deaf, neurodiverse and disabled artists with application support and dedicated funding. |
| | 12) Actively target underrepresented artists in programme development. Measure social class for all applicants and ensure interventions support those who are underrepresented in the arts sector |
| | 13) Support the UK Wide "All-In" scheme. |
| Experimentation And Innovation | 14) Strengthen opportunities for artists to collaborate and exchange ideas by leading one knowledge exchange event annually |
| | 15) Work with the Department for Communities to develop a Creative Industries Policy |
| | 16) Invest to support artists and organisations working with new technologies through Creative industries programmes |
| | 17) Capture new work across all of our investment |
| | 18) Enhance and encourage R&D within existing investment |

We have systems in place to track progress against these objectives, including indicators to ensure that we are on track to deliver each of them. This operates as part of our overall corporate governance systems which ensure connection between our operational work, our strategic intentions and our control systems.

| Society: | |
|--|--|
| Social, Economic And Environmental Benefits | 19) Develop one National Lottery Programme with key themes and open twice per year |
| | 20) Independently evaluate impacts of National Lottery investment to support economic and social outcomes |
| | 21) Collect, monitor and share insights on National Lottery investment to support advocacy work |
| | 22) Ensure climate is a theme within all investment to support/enable artists to respond to the climate emergency |
| | 23) Encourage sustainable practices and policies within all investment through contractual obligations |
| Access And Participation | 24) Share knowledge from climate monitoring groups to ensure up to date information. |
| | 25) Prioritise engagement with underrepresented groups within all of our investment |
| | 26) Promote and raise awareness of activities across media channels |
| | 27) Support the Arts Council NI Collection and measure impacts and reach across NI |
| | 28) Develop local, national and international opportunities for artists to reach more audiences |
| | 29) Promote the UK wide access scheme (All In) to ensure D/deaf, disabled and neurodiverse audiences are able to participate fully |
| | 30) Ensure audience development is encouraged in all of our investment |
| | 31) Monitor the NI public perception and participation in arts |
| Advocacy | 32) Develop a three-year advocacy strategy supported by activities to demonstrate the value of arts in NI |
| | 33) Develop an advocacy webpage as a sector resource and share case studies |
| | 34) Develop a three-year strategic research plan and commission research and evaluation projects and share results widely |
| Organisational | 35) Publish ACNI investment/funding opportunities for the financial year |
| | 36) Ensure ACNI is efficient and effective by developing workforce training and external review of structure and staff resources |
| | 37) Collect feedback from sector, partners and staff on perceptions of our work |
| | 38) Complete review of staffing resources and structure aligned to the new strategy. |
| | 39) Explore moving to a suitable building to accommodate hybrid working |
| | 40) Ensure ACNI provides value for money and streamline process for applicants |
| | 41) Develop, manage, and assess all programme investment in a timely manner |
| | 42) Develop an ACNI environmental corporate policy |
| | 43) Develop a long-term Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy and actions and publish on our website |

Outcomes for the Arts Sector & Outcomes for Society



Belfast Tradfest Summer Fest presents a packed programme of traditional music, song and dance from Irish and Ulster-Scots musical traditions.

Sector

FINANCIAL STABILITY

Government investment in the arts in Northern Ireland has fallen from £14.1 million in 2011-12 to £9.7 million in 2023-24. When inflation is taken into account, the 2011-12 baseline figure is worth £19.7m in 2023-24,¹⁰ a drop of £10 million assuming no changes from 2011-12.

We will continue to explore partnership opportunities within DfC, other public bodies and philanthropic organisations to boost our budget within what we recognise is a very challenging public spending climate. We will also support initiatives around capacity building, financial sustainability and strengthening the health of organisations working in the creative sector.

1) Long-term outcomes based investment

Through the Annual Funding Programme (AFP), in 2023-24 we invested in 84 organisations (see Table 2). We were able to award largely stand-still public investment, despite a reduction of 5% from the previous year in our opening Exchequer allocation. However, the creative sector has been weakened, facing higher costs of delivery. Our Annual Funding Survey shows that in 2022-23 earned income increased by 72% year-on-year, now exceeding pre-COVID levels.¹¹ However, core running costs increased by 16% and are now 43% higher than before the pandemic.

Our FY 22-23 review of AFP concluded that multiannual investment would give more financial stability to arts organisations and enable them to plan and manage risk more effectively. It also made it clear that how we report the impact and outcomes of this investment could be streamlined and strengthened.

Our top actions:

- We will invest in a multi-annual arts investment programme aligned to strategic outcomes that will run from Autumn FY24/25 – Autumn FY26/27.
- We will develop a set of investment principles for all investments for 2024-2027.
- We will develop an outcomes framework and collect, analyse and present insights annually to demonstrate impacts of our investment.

2) Income generation

For every £1 of AFP investment, organisations were able to raise £1.39 in other funding sources in 2022-23, even after considering their location and art form¹². Arts organisations that we invest in as part of this programme have generated almost £200m in non-government funding from 2010-2020.

The Arts Council believes in the role of public investment for the arts and supports and encourages artists and arts organisations to diversify their income sources. Public investment provides organisations with the resources and stability to apply and manage non-government funding and increase earned income. If the Arts Council can access further financial resources for the sector through income generation, the return on investment could be enhanced.

Our top actions:

- We will maintain and build strategic partnerships to boost income and networks to the sector throughout 2024-2027
- We will undertake a scoping exercise to assess how the Arts Council can generate more income for the sector (opportunities across private, public and philanthropic funders) by Autumn 2025.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

We will continue to support freelance artists and arts organisations to adapt to changes in working practices and employment regimes. We will also support efforts to uphold and promote all relevant legislation and best-practice as it relates to professional conduct, diversity and equality in the workplace. We welcome the introduction of a UK wide Creative Industries Standards Authority¹³ and will support the aims to uphold and improve standards of behaviour across the creative industries.

We want the increasing diversity of Northern Ireland society to be reflected in the audiences, leaders, producers and creators of a progressive and dynamic arts sector. We will measure our progress by collecting, analysing and reporting on data relating to the equality and the diversity of the work and organisations we invest in.

We are committed to fair pay for artists and professionals working in the creative community. We wish to ensure all organisations and projects which receive public funding are demonstrating best practice in this area and that they understand the impact on the wider sector of not doing so.¹⁴

1) Artistic talent and developing the wider arts workforce

We will continue to value, celebrate and support artists through our routine system of awards and commissions and by developing further opportunities to highlight their work at home and abroad where possible. Maintaining our relationships with relevant partners, we will ensure with relevant partners that there are proper career pathways and progression in our sector.

Working closely with the British Council and other key partners, the Arts Council will ensure that Northern Ireland's arts organisations, artists and arts can connect internationally and develop an international perspective through profiling work, exchanging ideas and developing relationships. We are also a member of the International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies (IFACCA) and will continue to develop important relationships through that network.

Our top actions:

- Review, design and open SIAP and encourage applications from emerging artists.
- Invest in a three-year programme to support artists' wellbeing and mental health and launch in Spring 2024.
- Explore a pilot mentoring programme in FY24/25 within the Support for Individual Artist Programme and ringfence support for emerging artists.
- Generate international opportunities for Northern Ireland artists to showcase their work through the Four Nations International Fund.

2) Inclusivity and representation in the sector

The Arts Council will develop an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) plan¹⁵ to reinforce its commitment to fulfilling its Section 75 duties. The Equality Monitoring Working Group was set up in 2013 as part of the Art Council's arrangements for assessing compliance with Section 75 duties. Its function is to provide strategic leadership for the outworking of the EDI plan by ensuring that equality and diversity is embedded across the organisation. Chaired by the Director of Strategic Development and Partnerships, the group meets regularly to review progress.

Our work supporting d/deaf, disabled and neurodiverse artists will be further enhanced by our partnership agreement with the [University of Atypical](#) to ensure d/deaf, disabled and neurodiverse artists can access support during grant application processes. We will continue our involvement as a partner in the UK wide access scheme 'All In' and explore opportunities for the role of the scheme in Northern Ireland.

Our top actions:

- Refresh existing deliberative forums for rural and global majority/minority ethnic artists
- Provide ongoing support for D/ deaf, neurodiverse and disabled artists with application support and dedicated funding.
- Actively target underrepresented artists in programme development. Measure social class for all applicants and ensure interventions support those who are underrepresented in the arts sector
- Support the UK Wide 'All-In' scheme.

¹⁰ Inflation calculator | Bank of England

¹¹ Arts organisations seek new sources of funding amid... | Arts Council NI (artscouncil-ni.org)

¹² Annual funding survey results 2022-2023 | Arts Council NI (artscouncil-ni.org)

¹³ <https://ciisa.org.uk/>

¹⁴ ACNI-Rates-of-Pay-for-Artists-March-2022.pdf (artscouncil-ni.org)

¹⁵ The EDI plan represents a clear statement of the Arts Council's ongoing commitment to fulfilling statutory obligations in compliance with Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended by the Disability Discrimination (NI) Order 2006).

EXPERIMENTATION AND INNOVATION

We aim to create an environment that supports artistic innovation, nurtures risk-taking and enables the sector to adapt and thrive in a rapidly changing world. Innovation and experimentation in the arts are not limited to technology. They may encompass a wide range of creative approaches and collaborations that push the boundaries of traditional art forms and engage audiences in new and exciting ways; for example, collaborations between artists from different disciplines or exploring new themes and issues in artistic work such as environmental sustainability or social justice.

1) Enabling innovation and artistic risk taking

We are committed to partnership working to contribute towards the development of the entire arts sector. The Arts Council will continue to develop and implement a Creative Industries Programme in partnership with NI Screen, Future Screens NI and Digital Catapult.

Our top actions:

- Strengthen opportunities for artists to collaborate and exchange ideas by leading one knowledge exchange event annually.
- Work with DfC to develop a Creative Industries Policy.
- Invest to support artists and organisations working with new technologies through Creative industries programmes.
- Capture new work across all of our investment.
- Enhance and encourage R&D within existing investment.

Society

SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

For decades, the arts have not only been a source of entertainment, but also a powerful tool for weaving communities together and fostering positive social change. The arts play a crucial role in mental well-being and individual growth. The evidence in this area¹⁶ and the Arts Council's independently evaluated National Lottery interventions demonstrate positive impacts across reducing loneliness and isolation, promoting positive mental health and wellbeing, and enhancing confidence and resilience among young people¹⁷.

1) Addressing contemporary societal challenges

We have prioritised actions that directly address contemporary societal challenges as well as economic benefits.

There is a need to scale-up this work and increase public awareness and understanding of the role of arts to address contemporary societal challenges.

Our top actions:

- Develop one National Lottery Programme with key themes and open twice per year (2025-26).
- Independently evaluate impacts of National Lottery investment to support economic and social outcomes.
- Collect, monitor and share insights on National Lottery investment to support advocacy work.

2) Supporting the sector to drive awareness, engagement and positive change in response to climate change

We are fully committed to being part of the journey to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050. The cultural and creative sectors have an important role to play in helping Northern Ireland prepare for the climate-changed future by challenging, informing and engaging audiences in conversations about the environment and climate change.

Our work in this area will be informed by sectoral targets set by the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022. We will also support the delivery of relevant actions outlined within DfC climate priorities.

We will support sector-led responses to climate change, including Green Arts NI, a sustainability network that now represents over 70 cultural organisations and individuals across Northern Ireland.

Travel and touring (both to and from Northern Ireland) are essential to the arts here, but as climate legislation becomes law in NI, and the impact of climate changes becomes more evident, so does our need to respond to the challenge. This requires finding a way to sustain a means of producing and sharing art, which supports our transition to a global low carbon future.

Our top actions:

- Ensure climate is a theme within all investment to support/enable artists to respond to the climate emergency.
- Encourage sustainable practices and policies within all investment through contractual obligations.
- Share knowledge from climate monitoring groups to ensure up to date information.



Pictured at the 142nd RUA Annual Exhibition at the Ulster Museum are three of the 2023 Arts Council Major Individual Artist Award winners, visual artist Sharon Kelly and writers, Gail McConnell and Jan Carson. A fourth recipient is poet Stephanie Conn.

¹⁶ For summary evidence on the impact of the arts on health outcomes: <https://ncch.org.uk/creative-health-review>. For summary evidence on the impact of the arts on place making: <https://www.culturehive.co.uk/CV/resources/research-digest-culture-and-placemaking/?owner=CH>
¹⁷ Evaluation commissioned by ACNI on the Creative Schools Partnership Programme: <https://artscouncil-ni.org/resources/creative-schools-partnership-evaluation-report-2023>. Evaluation commissioned by ACNI on the Arts and Older People programme: <https://artscouncil-ni.org/resources/2022-arts-and-older-people-programme-report>. Evaluation commissioned by ACNI on the Rural Engagement Arts Programme: <https://artscouncil-ni.org/resources/real-round-1-evaluation>

ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION

Efforts to increase and deepen attendance and participation in the arts are hampered by lack of data, resources and experienced staff to design and implement long-term marketing and audience development strategies. Partnerships are needed with relevant stakeholders (e.g. Local Authority venues and Tourism NI) to align priorities and reporting to reduce the cost of data collection.

We will ensure that budgets for marketing, audience development and evaluation are appropriately considered when making funding decisions.

1) Investing to deepen, widen and diversify audiences and participants.

Audience development will be a key theme in all our investment.

We support *thrive* to work with the arts sector in NI to develop long term audience development strategies as well as support with data collection in relation to audiences. We will ensure our investment through grant programmes encourages the sector to grow public engagement with the arts including specific engagement programmes to reach underrepresented groups.

We will encourage data collection and market research on preferences and barriers to inform programming and deepen existing relationships with audiences and participants.

We report on equality characteristics annually to the Equality Commission of NI¹⁸, but we have extended our inclusion plans to include social class and region (rural/urban). From our research and data on engagement across NI, our priorities over the period of this three-year plan will be engagement with young people, older people, working class communities, D/deaf, disabled and neurodiverse audiences, LGBTQIA+ and minority ethnic/global majority communities.

We will work with partners across the UK to deliver 'All-In', a cultural access scheme which is committed to improving the experience of D/deaf, disabled, and neurodivergent people when attending creative and cultural events.

Our top actions:

- Prioritise engagement with underrepresented groups within all of our investment.
- Promote and raise awareness of activities across media channels.
- Support the Arts Council NI Collection and measure impacts and reach across NI.
- Develop local, national and international opportunities for artists to reach more audiences.
- Promote the UK wide access scheme (All In) to ensure D/deaf, disabled and neurodiverse audiences are able to participate fully.
- Ensure marketing and audience development is encouraged in all of our investment.
- Monitor the NI public perception and participation in arts.



'Allies & Memory Box'. Green Light Dance Company's double-bill of contemporary dance at the Belfast International Arts Festival, showcasing the work of two Belfast-based choreographers, Suzannah McCreight and Helen Hall

ADVOCACY

We believe in the transformative power of the arts, envisioning a future where the sector is valued within society and across government. We recognise the fundamental value of artistic expression and its profound impact on individual lives, communities and the cultural fabric of NI.

1) Working in partnership to demonstrate the positive impact of arts

We are committed to working in partnership to elevate the value of arts across society. We will amplify the voices of artists and communities through research, evaluation and engagement, and champion the perspectives and experiences of those involved in the arts highlighting their contributions. We will celebrate their achievements through PR and communications and support the sector with key insights via a dedicated page on our website. We will collaborate with policymakers and decision makers by engaging in open dialogue and providing robust evidence through our insights and develop our strategic research and evaluation plan to ensure we continue to fill evidence gaps and that we influence compelling narratives to

demonstrate the benefits of arts investment. We will empower everyone to connect with the arts, and work with partners to ensure arts experiences reach everyone in Northern Ireland and that everyone has the opportunity to engage with and appreciate the arts.

Our top actions:

- Develop a three-year advocacy strategy supported by activities to demonstrate the value of arts in NI.
- Develop an advocacy webpage as a sector resource and share case studies.
- Develop a three-year strategic research plan and commission research and evaluation projects and share results widely.

¹⁸ <https://artscouncil-ni.org/about-us/equality>

ORGANISATIONAL

1) Work as an effective and efficient organisation

We are committed to continually improving our performance, ensuring that we have the focus, innovation and adaptability to face an ever-changing environment.

This includes:

- Being flexible within the constraints of existing resources
- Re-purposing funds to meet immediate need
- Close collaboration with our Sponsor government department, including co-design of any required future funding programmes.
- Streamlining how we collect data to demonstrate impact

We recognise the importance of investing in our people and their learning development, strengthening relationships with our clients, and ensuring that our grant programmes and processes work effectively and create a culture of partnership with our stakeholders. We will commission an independent review of our resources and capacity to deliver our new 10-year strategy.

We have committed to ongoing learning and development and to prioritise training for all staff in relation to gender and sexual orientation, racial equality and d/deaf, disability and neurodiversity. We will reflect and learn and ensure that this is reflected in our engagement with applicants and partners.

We are also committed to improving how we collect and use data to support how we demonstrate impact socially, culturally, environmentally and economically. We will work with the sector to ensure we measure outcomes effectively, as well as outputs and activity. We will commission an independent project to streamline our grants process.

Our top actions:

- Publish ACNI investment/funding opportunities for the financial year.
- Ensure ACNI is efficient and effective by developing workforce training and review of resources.
- Collect feedback from sector, partners and staff on perceptions of our work.
- Complete review of staffing resources and structure aligned to the new strategy.
- Explore moving to a suitable building to accommodate hybrid working.
- Ensure ACNI provides value for money and streamline process for applicants.
- Develop, manage, and assess all programme investment in a timely manner.
- Develop an ACNI environmental corporate policy.
- Develop a long-term Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy and actions and publish on our website.

Risks to delivery

| Risk | Mitigation |
|--|---|
| Reduced Exchequer budget | Programmes will still open but artists and organisations supported will be reduced |
| Change in DfC strategic direction | Annual reviews built in to enable flexibility |
| Limited lottery resources | Programmes will still open but artists and organisations supported will be reduced |
| ACNI capacity to deliver | Review underway and recommendations will be reviewed and considered |
| Impacts and Outcomes not achieved | Quarterly reporting of progress and flexibility to change if the data suggests limited impacts |
| Misalignment between new strategic outcomes and what the organisation currently does | Effective communication to all staff on strategic outcomes and business planning aligned to performance measurement |
| Monitoring and evaluation are not effective at informing business planning and decision making | Ensure adequate systems are in place so that SMT, Board and arts development have access to monitoring and evaluation insights and are provided with timely recommendations to consider based on the data |
| Poor IT facilities and software | Ensure the grants management system is up-to-date and regular staff training on this |
| Cyber security | Ensure regular pen-testing |
| Climate emergency and adverse weather conditions on outdoor activities (extreme heat/rainfall) | Continue to monitor impacts of climate across the arts sector and apply interventions as appropriate |
| Political instability | Develop plans for different political scenarios |

Funding

The Arts Council receives expenditure funds from two main sources: Exchequer funding from the NI Budget through DfC; and National Lottery funds from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS).

We are working with a planning Exchequer budget figure (Resource) of £9.708m (2024/25) (£9.708m (2023/24)). The "indicative" Exchequer Capital budget is £900,000. The total Lottery income for the year is forecast at £9.736m (£9.436m Lottery Ticket sales and £0.300m Lottery Investment returns).

In the current economic climate, the Arts Council is constantly reviewing its overhead costs. The budget for 2024/25 is £0.699m.

The Arts Council continues to monitor costs rigorously to ensure we meet our statutory guidelines and maintain corporate governance standards.

Subject to funding, we aim to provide support for a Small Capital Programme and the Musical Instruments Programme (bands, groups and individuals). Along with the purchase of artwork for the Arts Collection, these programmes will support artists and organisations and are key areas we are striving to support.

Northern Ireland Opera and the Grand Opera House present 'The Juniper Tree'. Photo: Neil Harrison Photography and Northern Ireland Opera.



Appendix 1

24-25 Investment Schedule / Programme Opening

| Programme | Open | Close |
|---|--------|---------|
| Arts & Older People Programme | TBC | TBC |
| Creative Industries - Individuals | May-24 | Jun-24 |
| Creative Industries - Organisations | Jun-24 | Aug-24 |
| Multi Annual Arts Investment Programme | TBC | TBC |
| Musical Instruments for Bands | Aug-24 | Sep-24 |
| Musical Instruments for individuals | Aug-24 | Sep-24 |
| Musical instruments for Professional and Nonprofessional Performing Groups | Aug-24 | Sep-24 |
| National Lottery Mental Health artists programme (in partnership with Baring) | Feb-25 | Apr-25 |
| National Lottery Project Funding | Apr-24 | May-24 |
| National Lottery Travel awards | May-24 | Rolling |
| Rural Engagement Arts Programme | Jun-24 | Aug-24 |
| Small Capital Grants Programmes | Aug-24 | Sep-24 |
| Support for Individual Artists (SIAP) | Jul-24 | Aug-24 |

Appendix 2

RESOURCE ALLOCATION

2024/25 Resource allocated by Programme (per Board meeting 8 December 2023)

| Programme | Exchequer | Lottery | Total |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| Annual Funding Programme | £8,205,122 | £4,045,778 | £12,250,900 |
| Other AFP | | £1,100,500 | £1,100,500 |
| Creative Schools | | £80,763 | £80,763 |
| Mental Health & PTSD | | £294,600 | £294,600 |
| NI Screen | | £112,500 | £112,500 |
| Project Funding | | £1,378,404 | £1,378,404 |
| Seamus Heaney | | £50,000 | £50,000 |
| Creative Industries | | £190,000 | £190,000 |
| Support for Individual Artists | £35,000 | £1,504,000 | £1,539,000 |
| Safeguarding | £29,500 | | £29,500 |
| TOTAL | £8,269,622 | £8,756,545 | £17,026,167 |

Appendix 3

OUR PROGRESS IN FY23-24

In FY2023-24 we had 28 dedicated business plan actions that were monitored quarterly. At the end of FY22-23 the progress was as follows:

| Row Labels | Count of RAG |
|--------------------------------|--------------|
| Planning / scoping stage | 2 |
| On target / ongoing | 21 |
| On hold / no longer proceeding | 4 |
| Completed | 1 |
| Grand Total | 28 |

Please note that the 4 actions that did not proceed were due to resource constraints. ACNI received confirmation of a 5% cut and these actions were contingent on resource being available.

Risks to delivering objectives in the business plan

- Budget constraints
- Emerging from COVID impacts
- Impacts of leaving the EU
- Resourcing challenges
- Procurement delays
- Sector capacity to deliver
- Political instability (i.e. Assembly collapse)
- Shifting Ministerial priorities
- Shifting priorities from strategic partners

OUR PROGRESS AGAINST STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

FY22-23 was the fourth year in our five-year strategic framework (2019-24). The table below quantifies progress against actions specified in the original plan using the RAG status and KPIs. This analysis was conducted in Q2 of Y4.



| Status | Number | % |
|---------------------|-----------|-------------|
| Completed | 35 | 66% |
| Not completed | 8 | 15% |
| Partially Completed | 10 | 19% |
| Total | 53 | 100% |

| Further detail | Number | % |
|--------------------------|-----------|-------------|
| Completed | 35 | 66% |
| due for completion 23/24 | 1 | 2% |
| insufficient budget | 6 | 11% |
| insufficient capacity | 5 | 9% |
| no longer relevant | 2 | 4% |
| Other | 4 | 8% |
| Total | 53 | 100% |

| Status | Connect | Inspire | Lead |
|---------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Completed | 10 | 10 | 15 |
| Not completed | 1 | 5 | 2 |
| Partially Completed | 7 | 2 | 1 |
| Total | 18 | 17 | 18 |

Arts Council of Northern Ireland

info@artscouncil-ni.org
artscouncil-ni.org

 ArtsCouncilNI
 @ArtsCouncilNI

Published: December 2024



Funded by
Department for

Communities

An Roinn

Pobal

Mánnystrie o

Communities

www.communities-ni.gov.uk