

PROFILE

The Arts Council understands participatory arts to include a broad range of practice where people collaborate with skilled artists to make or interpret art. The core purpose of this work is to develop creative individuals and communities and this is central to the Arts Council's purpose in all art forms, schemes and programmes.

The Arts Council values work where artists collaborate with people and gives parity of esteem to collaborative practice, relative to other practice. The Arts Council equally values the many ways that art is made.

The Arts Council's purpose in this field is to ensure high quality artistic engagement for partners and participants which has lasting impact on artistic ambition, skills and policy. We do this by supporting accountable, 'best practice' supports and processes. To measure our impact we look at peoples' artistic development in terms of 'distance-travelled', acknowledging that outcomes can be subtle, process and product are inextricable, and excellence is possible without there necessarily being an aesthetically excellent product. We advocate a reciprocal relationship where the arts community enriches the public and the public enriches the arts community's practice. The Arts Council does not solely value the public as audiences; we endorse equally their involvement as makers and shapers of art. This informs all of our policies.

A core Arts Council purpose in participatory arts is to enable innovation and development of art forms, and best practice supports and development for artists. We acknowledge that some of Ireland's most innovative practice currently stems from participatory arts.

The Arts Council endorses a 'cradle to grave' definition of 'the individual artist'. In determining quality, and setting the parameters of its supports in this field, the Arts Council does not discriminate between 'professional' or 'voluntary/amateur' practice.

The Arts Council endorses models where an artist or organisation is fundamentally a resource for enabling peoples' creativity, and where this is evidenced in organisation-wide planning, policy and values. We endorse this model throughout all of our policies.

The Arts Council endorses multi-agency partnerships (e.g., Arts and Health), supporting these in order to develop policy and joined-up practice. We endorse this model in all our policies. When evaluating impact or advocating appropriate artistic processes, the Arts Council takes all partners' objectives into account. At a national level we aspire to be a partner, working with diverse sectors to develop shared objectives and joined-up policy.

We wholly endorse the values of participatory arts throughout our policy and planning. We acknowledge that 'best practice' participatory arts are often participant-led, enabling people to make or shape 'their own' art, validating peoples' own artistic perceptions, valuing cultural diversity, often valuing all genres equally and enabling inclusiveness. We acknowledge that participatory arts are complex and multi-layered and work in many different ways, engaging audiences, visitors, collaborators, makers and producers of art.

STRENGTHS

- We wholly endorse Article 27 of the declaration of human rights which states that 'Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community'
- The 2003 Arts Act's overarching aim to 'promote development of and participation in the arts' is the Arts Council's central, overarching mandate.
- We have adopted and wholly endorse the 10 governing principles and 13 key guidelines in the Council of National Cultural Institutions (CNCI) publication *A Policy Framework for Education, Community, Outreach*.
- Some of Ireland's most exciting and innovative work is being produced when people collaborate with skilled artists to make art, generating new idioms and new ideas which innovate the way the arts are developed.
- Participatory arts are progressive, forward-thinking and they offer visionary models for learning, for creativity, and for culture and society for the future. Developments in this area put us at the centre of debate and advocacy about broader cultural policy and provision in a 'joined-up' society.
- Relative to other areas, participatory arts have shown particular innovation, evolution and development in recent years, both with and without our support.

CHALLENGES

- The Arts Council must respond to this evolving practice through joined-up, organisation-wide values, policy and planning and with responsive, new-and-additional funds, meaningful criteria and appropriate funding structures.
- This practice suffers from short-termism and in the past the Arts Council has failed to mainstream tried-and-tested work. Participatory arts need sustainable, multi-agency partnership funds which include supports for artists and key workers, supports for evaluation and critical reflection, Phase I funds for research and development, supports for local/national/international partnerships, supports for process-based collaborative work.
- Multi-agency, process-based participatory arts are neither visible nor validated in the Arts Council's revenue funding structure; they can and do happen independently of a venue, festival, production company, institution or artists' resource.
- People working in this field rarely network and learn from each other in order to improve and validate their own work. Training routes for artists are very poor.
- The Arts Council currently has a limited role with socio-economic policy makers.
- We need to work more meaningfully with the voluntary/amateur arts community through all of our policies.

PROPOSED RESPONSES TO THOSE CHALLENGES

- A. Support networks and networking which enable information-sharing, critical reflection, dissemination of learning, and validation and development of practice for those involved in participatory arts.
- B. Support programmes which include training, mentoring and professional development for participatory arts practitioners, and clearly do this to a high standard.
- C. Devise a new funding instrument, based on longterm, multi-agency partnerships, embracing participatory arts, youth arts and arts education, in line with this policy.
- D. Provide incentive funding to organisations who centrally value and develop participatory arts within their programmes and who clearly do so to a high standard.
- E. Create a fund for research, evaluation, organisational development and leadership development in order to enable this practice to further develop.