



Clár Éire Ildánach
Creative Ireland
Programme



Rialtas Áitiúil Éireann
Local Government Ireland



Culture & Creativity Strategy

2023–2027



Leitrim

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Foreword

It is acknowledged that culture and creativity are a vibrant and active part of what Leitrim represents. Built on a rich cultural wellspring that goes back generations, the sector is held in high esteem by communities of individuals up and down the county that are eager to explore their own creativity and to explore their own environment in a creative way. The county is also home to more than 400 professionals who work in the area of Culture and Creativity, making the sector an important part of Leitrim's economy.

The Creative Ireland National Programme places creativity at the centre of people's lives; enhancing access to, engagement with, and the enjoyment of Ireland's culture and creativity in order to promote individual, community and national wellbeing. This strategy is being published following a period of unparalleled challenge and uncertainty. We are very cognisant of that and recognise that many of the projects that were developed through Leitrim's Creative Ireland programme over the last two years became beacons of light at a very difficult time. Leitrim County Council prides itself on its work in these areas and this initiative allows us to align our work to national policy and the five pillars prioritised by Creative Ireland.

As a local authority, strongly invested in culture and creativity, Leitrim County Council is delighted to present this Creative Ireland five-year strategy. Leitrim County Council's Creative Ireland team brings together expertise in arts, heritage, libraries, community development and enterprise. Through this team, and indeed all our staff, we look forward, over the next five years, to building on what we have already achieved, and by collaborating with all stakeholders, to further position culture and creativity at the centre of public life.

Lar Power

Chief Executive of Leitrim County Council

Cllr. Ita Reynolds Flynn

Cathaoirleach of Leitrim County Council

Creativity as we know it is a relatively new concept. People have always been creative of course, but considering creativity as an ability that everyone can engage in and nurture rather than an innate talent or gift only emerged in the early 1900s. In the 100 years since, our understanding and appreciation of creativity has expanded significantly, not only in how creativity is applied in art and science, but how we all use creativity to navigate and interpret our environments. Steve Jobs said:

"When you ask creative people how they did something, they feel a little guilty because they didn't really do it, they just saw something"

reasoning that creative people can more easily connect experiences and synthesize new things because they've thought about it more and done it more often. It's not surprising then that people such as artists and inventors are considered particularly creative given that they spend their entire working lives doing this and can do extraordinary things when creativity is coupled with highly developed skills and craft.

But everyone can be creative, and everyone can enjoy the satisfaction that comes from thinking about and making new things or solving problems by creating new solutions. In recent years, in addition to being a source of great pleasure and satisfaction, creativity has also come to be considered as one of the most important life skills we can have and fundamental to navigating the shifts inherent in the world today.

For all these reasons Leitrim County Council is deeply committed to promoting creativity within our communities, particularly amongst young people and communities with less access to such opportunities, and to supporting those who choose to pursue creative careers. In places like Leitrim where cultural activities form a strong point of identification, the Culture and Creativity sector makes a critical contribution to our economy, our society and our individual lives. Communities and individuals of all ages can develop confidence, a sense of self, and a shared understanding through creative expression. Every effort should be made to provide those opportunities, and this strategy provides us with the framework for how we can do that over the coming years.

Leitrim County Council Culture & Creativity Team

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Creative Ireland 2023–2027

The Creative Ireland Programme is an all-of-government initiative committed to enhancing access to, engagement with, and enjoyment of Ireland’s culture and creativity. Within the broad range of available definitions, creativity is considered as *a set of innate abilities and learned skills; the capacity of individuals and organisations to transcend accepted ideas and norms and by drawing on imagination to create new ideas that bring additional value to human activity.*

The vision of the Creative Ireland Programme 2023–2027 is to mainstream creativity in the life of the nation so that individually and collectively, in our personal lives and in our institutions, we can realise our full creative potential thereby promoting individual, community and national wellbeing.

The Creative Ireland Programme will deliver through collaboration and partnership promoting understanding and appreciation of the value of creativity in all its forms — whether through the arts, culture, heritage, or technology.

The Creative Ireland Programme will prioritise its work around five aspects for the period 2023–2027:

- Creative Youth
- Creative Communities
- Creative Industries
- Creative Health and Wellbeing
- Creative Climate Action and Sustainability

Through the Creative Ireland Programme, *Creative Communities* supports the partnership between the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, and Ireland’s local authorities. This partnership enables citizens and communities to explore their culture and creativity at local level and, where appropriate, leverage that creativity to strengthen wellbeing, advance social cohesion and support economic development.

Creative Communities is also innovative in deploying creativity to achieve greater integration across targeted policy priorities. This has delivered new creative engagement initiatives in relation to for example children and young people, older persons, climate action, and local economies. Individuals and communities’ perception about the role and value of culture and creativity as central to our wellbeing in its broadest sense is being enhanced.

The opportunity embraced within the Leitrim Culture and Creativity Strategy 2023–2027 is to support people’s participation, inclusion and expression within communities, and further strengthen local creative economies.



The Glens Street Session 2021

2 Culture and Creativity in Leitrim

“There are countless people in Leitrim today who would have lived their entire lives without engaging in a creative activity were it not for the Creative Ireland programme.”

Leitrim County Council’s first Culture and Creativity strategy accurately described the strengths and characteristics that underpin culture and creativity in Leitrim – the wellspring of cultural heritage, the substantial relative scale of the creative sector - which continues to grow - and the long-held aspiration of Leitrim County Council to fully embed culture and creativity into the broader planning for social, cultural and economic development in the county. Our methodology in pursuit of those objectives has been characterised by an approach that nurtures community engagement, supports artists, and brokers relationships between different communities, artists and agencies in order to maximise the quality and impact of outcomes for everyone involved.

Over the course of the last strategy, Leitrim County Council worked with community groups, organisations, venues and other agencies to develop 115 Open Call Projects, 58 Cruinniú na nÓg Projects, and 14 projects that supported the development of the Creative Economy.

It should be noted that much of the period covered by Leitrim’s first Culture and Creativity strategy was implemented during the most profound disruption to our society and our individual lives in living memory. As such, while the foundations of this new strategy, and its aspiration to embed culture and creativity into the local authority’s development plans remain unchanged, the unique nature of the last three years has given rise to much learning, and particularly to a greater appreciation of the enormous capacity of the creative sector to contribute in a positive way to the quality of people’s lives.

In 2020 as we acclimatised to operating in a completely different landscape, Leitrim County Council supported the development of over 30 new projects with different communities around the county. Many of these were carried out online with some reaching vast audiences such as Le Chéile Óna Chéile, which was one of the first such projects to use technology to develop a collective creative activity during lockdown. The innovative project by Áirc Damhsa featured young dancers from Leitrim and the surrounding counties as well as New York, dancing together to the music of the Bothy Band from within 2km of their own homes. Other projects were more intimate with much smaller groups and audiences such as the Silent Waltz project at the Glenfarne Ballroom of Romance where artists Michael McLoughlin and Roisin Loughrey worked with a small group of older couples at the centre that focussed on the meaning and value of dancing to them and the loss of that community during lockdown.

Contrary to expectations, arising from a new awareness and appreciation of the benefits of creativity, and despite the restriction placed on people’s movement and the limitations of technology at times, community engagement in creative activities increased substantially during that time. As a result, there are countless people in Leitrim today who would have lived their entire lives without engaging in a creative activity were it not for the Creative Ireland Programme at that difficult time.

The last three years were also very challenging for those who work in the creative sector as programmes, venues and galleries were closed overnight with the loss to those livelihoods and to the communities they serve. In the same way that the value and impact of the Creative Ireland Programme on communities has grown in appreciation, the important role of the Creative Ireland Programme in how it can strengthen the creative economy has also come into greater focus.



MESOCOSMS by Christine Mackey featuring Stephen (Herbie) McCann. **Photographer:** Cian Flynn

In tandem with community engagement projects, as part of the Government’s Jobs Stimulus Package provided through Creative Ireland, we were able to support professionals in the creative sector to develop new work and undertake internships and other professional development opportunities designed to enhance their careers post-Covid.

Looking forward, as consultation towards the development of this new strategy takes shape,

Leitrim County Council is also in the process of developing a Local Economic and Community Plan as well as an Arts Strategy, Library Strategy, Age Friendly Plan, and Economic Development Strategy. This provides a valuable opportunity to ensure consistency across the broader planning framework, due consideration for other strategic objectives of the council, and due consideration by other departments of the council’s objectives as regards culture and creativity.

3 The Creative Ireland Vision for Leitrim

The Creative Ireland vision for Leitrim is to contribute to the social, cultural and economic development of the county and its creative sector by placing creativity at the centre of people's lives.

Over the lifetime of this strategy, we will further extend the reach of the programme, providing opportunities for new communities and individuals of all ages and backgrounds to explore their own creativity, many for the first time. We will contribute to the development of the Creative Economy, helping ensure the sustainability of those who work in the creative sector.

To achieve this, we will employ a cross-departmental approach, and work in partnership with agencies and organisations across the county.



4 How The Creative Ireland Programme Works Principles and Values of Creative Communities

Creative Communities will continue to support local authorities as a wellbeing strategy through:

- **Policy** — Working in partnership across government supporting local authorities to deliver relevant local, regional, and national policies and priorities;
- **Practice** — Flexible, cross-cutting Culture and Creativity Teams providing an agile and adaptable approach central to the delivery of *Creative Communities* as it addresses locally-relevant priorities;
- **Participation** — Providing more opportunities for people to engage with and enjoy culture and creativity at local level in ways that underpin equality of access; and
- **Partnership** — Between central and local government, and Leitrim and our local culture and creative sectors.

This approach is based on addressing a shared, strategic agenda while delivering on the challenges and opportunities unique to each local authority area.

The *Creative Communities* partnership will be delivered in line with the following principles and values:

- i. Broaden access to, and participation in, cultural and creative activities locally.
- ii. Use culture and creativity as a catalyst for collaboration and innovation in achieving greater wellbeing, social cohesion, and economic development.
- iii. Strengthen the capacity of local authorities to integrate culture and creativity across place-making, regeneration, renewal, and the development of more vibrant, creative, and sustainable places.
- iv. Investing in culture and creativity to support environmental, social, and economic returns that help deliver local authority agendas – from local and regional, to national and international.
- v. Build on the agility and integrated approach of Culture and Creativity Teams to sustain further delivery of targeted collaborative programmes.

Modern Day Mummers featuring Edwina Guckian, Fionnuala Maxwell, Brian Mostyn.

Photographer: Brian Farrell

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The Strategic Priorities for Leitrim

The Creative Ireland vision in Leitrim is pursued through these five pillars:

- I. Creative Communities
- II. Creative Youth
- III. Wellbeing, Equality, Diversity & Inclusivity
- IV. Place, Environment & Climate Change
- V. Creative Enterprise

1. Creative Communities

The central tenet of this strategy is to provide opportunities for communities and individuals to explore their own creativity and to support those working in the creative sector to develop strong fruitful relationships with community groups, enhancing engagement, access and participation in creative activities.

Any cohort of people that comes together because they share a common place, interest or characteristic can be said to be a community, and as such, Creative Communities includes any group of people who come together to explore their own creativity, or any group of people who come together to explore themes that are important to them through creativity. In that sense this priority could include any and all communities of people that we engage with under any of the five priorities.

However, while participation rates in creative activities in Leitrim have always been relatively high, and the numbers of people, both participants and audiences, that have been involved in the Creative Ireland Programme is significant and continues to grow, these numbers still only account for a relatively small percentage of the entire population. Given that our goal is to provide every resident in Leitrim with the opportunity to explore their own creativity, we will continue to work in partnership with council departments, local and national

agencies and organisations, media and others to further that reach.

Our experience, and the feedback received through consultation, has taught us that for many groups in Leitrim finding out about the Creative Ireland Programme is simple and that the supports needed to develop a project are easily accessed, appropriate and helpful.

Despite this, for some specific communities, access to creative activities can involve a range of other obstacles that must be overcome. For that reason, we have developed two further pillars around Creative Youth and Wellbeing, Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity to address this.

Among the actions we will pursue under the Creative Communities pillar will include:

- To develop a comprehensive communications strategy to broaden awareness of the Creative Ireland programme generally.
- To promote the work of diverse potential project facilitators to community groups and all potential project applicants.
- To run a series of project planning workshops and project get-togethers to create a greater awareness of the programme, to celebrate the work done, to encourage a cross fertilisation of ideas and approaches, and to enable communities to develop well planned projects.

2. Creative Youth

When we invest in young people's creativity, we are investing in the future creativity of our society. Children & Young People continue to be a key priority for Leitrim County Council as children account for approximately 27% of the population. Moreover, Leitrim is also one of the most rural counties in Ireland with one of the highest dependency rates at all ages with, for example, the highest percentage of young people providing

unpaid help at home. This is reflected in school attendance where Leitrim has one of the lowest rates of absenteeism at primary level but one of the highest at secondary level. As a grouping, young people are more dependent on parents or other adults to access creative activities; they have complex and diverse needs that change continually throughout their 18 years; and as they often don't get to make their own decisions about participating in creative activities, greater attention must be given to providing those opportunities and ensuring that they are accessible and known about.

Among the actions we will pursue under this pillar are:

- To further develop and broaden access to Cruinniú na nÓg.
- To work with Leitrim Childcare Committee, preschools and others to develop projects specifically for children aged 0 to 4 years.
- To develop projects that encourage creative thinking in children aged 4 – 12.
- To work with a range of partners to enable young people aged 12 – 18 years to develop projects.
- To develop skillsets of professionals in the creative sector to work with children and young people, to facilitate such projects and to enhance the sustainability of those working in the creative sector.

3. Wellbeing, Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity.

Creative Ireland's Progress Report 2020: A Creative Response recognised the powerful contribution of creativity to stimulate positive health and wellbeing. The core proposition of the Creative Ireland Programme is that participation in such activities drives personal and collective creativity, with significant implications for individual and societal wellbeing.

While engagement in creative activities can have positive impacts on any member of society, the inability to be able to access those activities

or to explore creativity because of economic, geographic, language, physical or any other form of barrier, can have an adverse impact on wellbeing, not only because of the absence of that activity, but also for the compounding sense of isolation and stigmatisation that such barriers place on people when taken as a whole.

In addition to working to remove barriers to participation in creative activities, there are many people throughout all strands of society who are not part of any community group, who wouldn't consider themselves to be creative, and have never had the opportunity or invitation to explore their creativity. To address this, we will develop a new strand of programmes that are designed to be more visible and accessible to individuals that are not members of any group and work with media partners to help ensure their success.

Among the actions we will pursue under this pillar are:

- To work with relevant agencies and organisations to identify specific groups and cohorts that encounter barriers to participation in creative activities; to develop a greater understanding around these barriers; and to devise strategies and approaches to help overcome them.
- To develop skillsets of professionals in the creative sector to work with diverse communities in order to facilitate such projects and to enhance the sustainability of those working in the creative sector.

4. Place, Environment & Climate Change

Exploring how the arts, culture and heritage sectors can be used to promote dialogue around this pressing issue in ways that are provocative and engaging will be an essential part of this transformational process
- Creative Ireland Climate Action Plan

Every place has its distinctive features and characteristics that give rise to its creative culture. Leitrim is no different and is widely regarded as being culturally vibrant, rich in heritage and

remarkable, relative to its size, for its levels of activity and capacity across a wide range of art forms and cultural arenas.

Many people who moved to Leitrim in the last 30 years, particularly those who work in the creative sector, did so because of this cultural wellspring within an unspoilt rural landscape that they are determined to maintain and protect. These interests and concerns are shared with farming associations, environmental and heritage groups. Through the Creative Ireland Programme, Leitrim County Council has seeded the development of a large number of collaborative projects with well-rooted and new communities who have a strong attachment to place, environment and heritage.

These projects, that are heavily connected to place, tradition and heritage in a contemporary context, open conversations with the wider public about these themes and are increasingly concerned with the pressing challenges regarding climate change.

Among the actions we will pursue under this pillar are:

- To encourage, support and highlight Creative Ireland projects that celebrate Leitrim's Cultural Heritage and look to heritage as inspiration for contemporary creative projects.
- To encourage, support and highlight Creative Ireland projects that encourage awareness of our built and natural environment.
- To encourage, support and highlight Creative Ireland projects that seek to use creativity to bring about positive change with respect to our impact on climate and the environment.

5. Creative Economy

Under Future Jobs Ireland, the development of a Roadmap for the Creative Industries was identified as a key deliverable to diversify our enterprise base ensuring the Irish economy is more resilient and adaptable. Over a number of years, Leitrim County Council has placed a strong emphasis on the development of the creative economy and in particular the professional development and

sustainability of those who work in the creative sector. The stimulus for this is twofold. In the first instance, the percentage of people working in the creative sector in Leitrim is one of the largest in the country and continues to rise. The membership of Creative Frame, Leitrim County Council's Creative Sector Professional Development Programme, has grown each year, with over 400 current members while the Enterprise Ireland funded Creative Heartlands programme was designed by the LEOs and Arts Offices of Leitrim, Sligo and Roscommon to support the professional development and sustainability of those working in the film sector and the design sector and to support the broader development of the creative sector as a whole in the three counties.

Because the creative sector represents such a significant proportion of the workforce, it is essential that we seek to ensure that the practice and livelihoods of those that work in it are sustainable and, in any event, the initiatives we seek to develop as part of the Creative Ireland Programme require highly skilled individuals capable of facilitating those projects.

Moreover, while Leitrim enjoys a vibrant creative sector, it also faces significant challenges. As a rural county with a small, dispersed population, it is imperative that Leitrim County Council seeks to instil a culture of creativity and innovation in all aspects of the local economy. Leitrim's County Development Plan recognises that the creative sector *"serves to encourage creative thinking which can stimulate new ideas and approaches to how we live and work"* and further seeks to *"develop synergies with other areas."*

Together these strategies endorse the idea that while the creative sector plays a central function in the cultural wellbeing of the county, it also has vast implications socially and economically, the three strands of which are inherently intertwined. Among the actions we will pursue under this pillar are:

- To further develop the Creative Ireland Internship programme to support recent graduates to gain valuable work experience in the creative sector.



Sweeter the Tune. Artist and featuring in Image : Cathy Carmen.
Photographer: Leonora Neary

Magnetise by Undercurrent featuring Katie Burke



- To further develop the online professional development resource www.socialpracticetoolkit.com.
- To encourage, support and highlight Creative Ireland projects that are built around the use of new technologies.
- To encourage, support and highlight Creative Ireland projects that promote the value of creativity and creative thinking in business and industry.
- To work with schools and youth groups to broaden awareness of careers in the creative industries.
- To work with Leitrim LEO to develop mentoring and other supports for creative industry start-ups

6 Implementation by the Leitrim Culture and Creativity Team

Leitrim County Council has a Culture and Creativity Team in place to guide and oversee implementation of this Strategy.

The Culture and Creativity Teams are the cornerstone of Creative Communities across all 31 local authorities in Ireland. These teams bring together a significant range and level of expertise and, in Leitrim, include professionals from the arts, heritage, community, enterprise and libraries. This depth of expertise affords each local authority a level of insight, resources and delivery experience which few other public or private sector organisations can match.

The role of this team is to:

- Provide a collective forum for the ambition of culture and creativity within the local authority;
- Focus on diversity and inclusivity and enable harder to reach communities to participate in cultural and creative activities;
- Build on existing in-house expertise and strategies across areas of wellbeing, social cohesion and economic development to leverage culture and creativity to deliver on targeted local authority agendas;
- Enable a shift in how the cultural and creative sector is valued within and across local authorities and ensure that culture and creativity is embedded across local authority plans, policies and project teams;
- Drive cross-collaborative actions that support change and positive outcomes locally, and potentially between local authorities at regional level; and
- Be innovative and take risks – try new projects and new ways of working.


The delivery of the Strategy is led by the Director of Services for Housing, Corporate Services, Community and Cultural Services and the members of the Culture and Creativity Team for Leitrim County Council include the Senior Executive Officer with responsibility for Culture, Arts Officer, Heritage Officer, County Librarian, Head of Community, and Senior Development Officer for Economic Development. These structures and processes are a critical success factor that will enable Creative Communities to deliver on strategic priorities for Leitrim County Council.


Map of Leitrim



A Government of Ireland Initiative.
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