

# Leitrim Arts Strategy 2012-2017



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**leaders in arts development**

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## Background

Leitrim as a county is regarded and recognised as a place of unspoilt beauty, rich in character and culturally vibrant. Nestled in the north-west of Ireland, the county occupies an area of 1,876 sq. km and has a population of 31,778. The river Shannon which cuts through the county has over generations given rise to trade and an influx of people who sought out the quality of life and rich cultural offering for which the county is known.

Building on a strong pre-existing arts tradition in the county over many years, the development of organisations and infrastructure throughout the county has given rise to a significantly high proportion of artists living and working in the county.

This trend has continued as artists who live here are very much valued members of the community. They are valued for the essential contribution they have made to the development of the arts, and the contribution they have made to improve the quality of life for society as a whole.

While artists and infrastructure for the arts are the cornerstone and bedrock for a vibrant arts sector, they are part of an equation that is completed by communities young and old that engage in the arts as participants and audiences which, when taken together, helps create a society that is creative and open with a rich interest in people and the places in which we live.

## The role of the Arts

Historically, the role of the arts in any society sits alongside wider societal developments together with economic development, provision of education and any number of external factors which determine how people live. In recent years however, much greater emphasis is given to the importance of creativity, the role of the arts in promoting creativity, and the impact the arts have on each of our lives. As a consequence, much research, nationally and internationally, has been conducted into various impacts of the arts, such as the developmental benefits of participation in the arts for young people; the direct and indirect economic impact of the arts; the contribution the arts make to the cohesion of a community; promoting a creative society; and contributing to a sense of identity and place.

Undoubtedly the arts do impact positively on practitioners, participants and audiences. They are a vibrant part of our economy both of themselves and because of the impact they have on the image we present and the offering we provide to our own communities, visitors and potential investors. They serve to encourage creative thinking which can stimulate new ideas and approaches to how we live and work.

Increasingly the arts play a vital role in educational, social and health care environments. Participation in the arts by young people can play a vital role in the development of multiple intelligences. The arts can serve as a powerful mediating and developmental tool whereby groups and individuals, especially young people or those marginalised in society can discover and develop their own individuality, inherent qualities and build self confidence.

Ultimately though, and for everybody, the arts can act as a tool by which we engage with the world, view ourselves, examine our value systems, provoke thought and express ourselves as individuals, groups and as a society.

## Planning for the Arts

Leitrim County Council's vision as affirmed in its Corporate Plan is for *"County Leitrim to be a vibrant, growing and accessible County for people to live, work, learn, invest and visit."*

In order to achieve that vision, the Corporate Plan has established as an objective to *"continue to develop awareness of, opportunity for, and participation in the artistic life of Leitrim"* and to *"work to further develop and grow the creative sector of the County"*. The arts also play a role in helping achieve other objectives in the plan such as encouraging sustainable communities, social cohesion and economic development.

As the arts impact on many aspects of our lives –socially, culturally and economically– and are an integrated service of the Local Authority, planning for the arts, as well as setting out measures for the development of the arts specifically, should be cognisant of measures which strive to achieve common objectives.

## The National Context

In a national context, the 2003 Arts Act requires each local authority to prepare and implement plans for the development of the arts and empowers local authorities to directly assist the development of the arts for the purposes of stimulating public interest in the arts, promoting knowledge, appreciation and practice of the arts, or improving standards in the arts,

The Act defines the arts as *"Any creative or interpretative expression (whether traditional or contemporary) in whatever form, and includes, in particular, visual arts, theatre, literature, music, dance, opera, circus, film and architecture, and includes any medium which is used for those purposes."*

In accordance with current government directives, Leitrim County Council has engaged in a wide ranging consultative process, which will be ongoing, and has resulted in the compilation of a comprehensive and diverse range of suggestions and opinion from practitioners and the wider community as well as further contributing to a more complete audit of the sector. This process forms part of the development of a rolling strategy which will continue to inform programme development and provide quantitative analysis of the impacts of the initiatives contained in the plan.

## Review

Since the development of a distinct Arts Service within the Local Authority, the arts have increasingly played a more integrated and substantial role within the county. While there have been notable infrastructure and programme developments where the Local Authority has played a central and visible role, the continuous work of the Local Authority Arts Service for more than a decade, both independently and in conjunction with local and national arts organisations and agencies, has served to develop and make central the arts sector within the county serving the needs of the community.

Leitrim County Council's previous arts strategies, and indeed the majority of arts strategies, share a common language which seeks to encourage awareness, access, participation and professional development. These objectives will always be the hallmarks of arts planning as they describe the different ways by which people engage with the arts as an audience, participant or professional practitioner or organisation.

What varies between strategies is the emphasis that is placed on individual approaches to arts development and particular objectives in response to current needs and the resources available to meet those needs.

While this strategy is being prepared in one of the most challenging economic environments of recent years, nonetheless it is vitally important that the vision of the plan rises above current challenges, is ambitious, maintains long term objectives, maximises opportunities, and provides the best service possible within current resources.

As such this strategy builds on the achievements of previous plans, putting programmes and projects that have proved successful on a secure and permanent footing; developing new and innovative programmes and strategies which improve the profile, participation and practice of the arts in the county; maintains existing, and develops new strategic partnerships with other agencies and organisations to achieve shared goals; and endeavours to ensure that to work as an artist in County Leitrim is a viable option for emerging and established artists who wish to do so.

# Leitrim Arts Strategy 2012 – 2017

## Vision

*To continue to develop in Leitrim, greater access and quality participation in the arts for all people living in or visiting the county; to nurture individuals, organisations, festivals and communities to be part of that provision, and to work in partnership with local, national and international agencies to achieve common goals.*

## Themes

In devising this strategy, and following public consultation, the work of the arts service over the coming years will be categorised under four themes. Each action undertaken will seek to address one or more of these themes, and collectively all actions in this plan must advance all four areas.

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<b>A</b>	<b>Awareness</b>	<i>Bring greater awareness to the culturally rich and artistically vibrant offering and services in Leitrim.</i>
<b>B</b>	<b>Access &amp; Participation</b>	<i>Ensure that each citizen has the opportunity to engage with, and participate in, the arts fully.</i>
<b>C</b>	<b>Professional Development</b>	<i>Support and assist artists and enables arts organisations, venues and festivals to achieve their potential.</i>
<b>D</b>	<b>Linkages</b>	<i>Encourage partnership across all sectors and agencies in order to achieve shared goals.</i>

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## Theme A – Awareness

*Bring about greater awareness of the culturally rich and artistically vibrant offering and services in Leitrim.*

- Awareness among communities in the county about events and activities that people can attend or participate in.
- Awareness of Leitrim arts - nationally and internationally.
- Awareness of the supports and opportunities available to arts practitioners, encouraging artists and arts organisations to develop their practice here.
- Networking amongst practitioners.

While participation levels in the arts throughout the county are relatively high and publications such as the What's On Guide widely distributed, there are still many people throughout the county who are unaware of events, activities and opportunities that exist. Similarly for visitors to the county, further mechanisms need to be put in place to ensure that up-to-date information on cultural events is easily accessible.

Leitrim has benefited greatly from the diversity and quality of the arts sector here which has served to provide Leitrim with an wealth of events and activities to engage with and to present Leitrim as an open, interesting and artistically vibrant county. To maintain this culture into the future we must continue to develop and promote a positive environment in which artists are encouraged to live and work here.

## Theme B - Access & Participation

*Ensure that each citizen has the opportunity to engage with, and participate in, the arts fully.*

As a local authority, it is our duty to ensure that provision for the arts is as accessible as possible to all members of the community equally. Special attention must to given to sectors of the community which experience particular difficulties to accessing cultural activities such as people with disabilities, people in long term care, those on lower incomes, and those who rely on other people or services to access cultural services such as children and older people.

Furthermore there are many people throughout the county who for one reason or another have never known the arts to be relevant or valuable to them. As part of our planning for the arts, it is important that people who heretofore haven't engaged in cultural activities previously are provided with that opportunity and encouraged to do so.

## **Theme C - Professional Development**

*Support and assist artists and enables arts organisations, venues and festivals to achieve their potential.*

There are many opportunities for emerging and established artists to further their practice in Leitrim, particularly through the supports of Leitrim County Council and the Arts Council, collaboration with artists already established here, and the services of venues and organisations such as The Dock; Leitrim Sculpture Centre; The Glens Centre; Leitrim Design House; Screen Northwest etc. There are many organisations, festivals and venues such as the Cornmill Theatre, the Joe Mooney Summer School and Solas Art Gallery which also provide valued services, nurture amateur and professional artists and encourage young people to engage with the arts. As part of this strategy will we work with these and the many other organisations in the county to enhance this provision so that artists in all disciplines are further enabled to continue their development.

The opportunities and offerings provided by these venues, organisations and festivals are equally valuable to participants and audiences from here and elsewhere that come to see or take part in that work. As such, we will endeavour to provide advice and practical supports for the continued development of these organisations.

## **Theme D – Linkages**

*Encourage partnership across all sectors and agencies in order to achieve shared goals.*

Particularly in the current climate, the arts can continue to thrive where individuals, groups and agencies can collaborate in order to achieve shared goals.

In recognising a wider appreciation of the positive impact that the arts have on a wide variety of sectors, such as health, education, tourism and the wider creative sector, the potential to develop programmes and projects in partnership with agencies in these sectors must be explored and developed.

Local agencies such as Leitrim Tourism, Leitrim County Enterprise Board, Leitrim Development Company and Leitrim VEC are vitally important to the successful development of a wide range of arts initiatives.

As a consequence of enhanced networking within the arts sector on a local, national and international basis, new opportunities can emerge at each of these levels, and efforts will be made to encourage and enhance this networking.

## **Objective 1**

**Identify sectors and members of the community who are currently unaware of, or unable to engage with the arts and assist the development of high quality arts programmes appropriate to those contexts.**

### **Actions**

1. Work with Leitrim Development Community, Leitrim VEC and other agencies to develop comprehensive databases of all sectoral, community and voluntary groups within the county.
2. Determine groupings of individuals who are not part of existing organised groups.
3. Compile listings, application criteria and schedules of available funding opportunities for community and voluntary groups from other agencies such as the Arts Council, Create, NYCI etc.
4. Assist community and voluntary groups in the development of arts programmes and advise these groups in the preparation of funding applications to various funding agencies.
5. Work with local agencies involved in education, social and health care with a view to developing both pilot projects and more comprehensive arts programmes across a range of disciplines and approaches.

## **Objective 2**

**Continue the development Leitrim Youth Theatre Company in association with The Dock, The Glens Centre and The Cornmill Theatre.**

### **Actions**

1. Establish a management committee for LYTC consisting of leaders, host venues and members to oversee the organisation of the company.
2. Develop an annual co-production involving members from all branches.
3. Develop a programme of visiting tutors covering all areas of theatre practice.
4. Provide advice and develop follow-on opportunities for young people when they leave youth theatre.

## **Objective 3**

**Provide opportunities for children to engage with high quality arts activities through primary schools.**

### **Actions**

1. Continue to develop the Artist in Schools Scheme as a mechanism for artists to engage with young people to develop high quality, well planned arts programmes.
2. Develop, in association with Leitrim Library Service, a collection of resource material for primary teachers to independently implement arts programmes in schools.

## **Objective 4**

**Investigate the potential for development within music education for young people in the county.**

### **Actions**

1. Explore the continued development of traditional music amongst young people beyond the Leitrim Equation programme.
2. Explore the development of a County Youth Orchestra.
3. Explore the development of supports for other music forms such as contemporary, jazz, electronic and rock music.
4. Explore the development of primary school music support programme.

## **Objective 5**

**Enhance the capacities of venues, festivals and arts organisations.**

### **Actions**

1. Work with venues and organisations and other local and national agencies such as Leitrim Tourism and Leitrim Development Company with a view to maximising collective marketing and advertising.
2. Work with local and national agencies, to develop the capacity of festivals in the county to maximise their potential in terms of programming, marketing and project management.
3. Support the continued development of The Dock, as a Local Authority developed venue and a core service of the arts in Leitrim.
4. Support the continued development of other strategic venues critical to the continued development of the arts in Leitrim including, but not limited to, The Glens Centre, Leitrim Sculpture Centre, Solas Arts Gallery and The Cornmill Theatre.

## **Objective 6**

### **Enhance the promotion of arts events through on-line media**

#### **Actions**

1. Research how networking among venues and event organisers can be best supported under the auspices of a member based event website.
2. Develop an on-line version of the What's On Guide [www.whatsoninleirim.ie](http://www.whatsoninleirim.ie) to act as both a clash diary for event organisers and as an enhancement to the reach of the printed guide locally, nationally and internationally.
3. Promote the use of this website by the general public, and encourage other websites – accommodation, tourism related and others to include the site as part of their homepage.
4. Ensure that all events which form part of the What's On Guide are also entered onto the national on-line arts diary Culture Fox.

## **Objective 7**

### **Conduct research and determine strategies regarding infrastructure for artists.**

#### **Actions**

1. Map artists' studios across the county with a view to providing this information on-line for potential clients/visitors who wish to visit artists in their studios.
2. Examine the potential of a programme utilising vacant spaces in the county for temporary use as artists' studios and temporary galleries.
3. Examine the potential of developing longer term studio spaces where the opportunity exists and the need arises.

## **Objective 8**

### **Encourage the development of opportunities for artists to develop their practice and make new work**

#### **Actions**

1. Actively promote services and opportunities available to artists who wish to base their practice here.
2. Provide direct support to artists to enable them to realise ambitious new work.
3. Develop a peer mentoring programme where established artists in all disciplines are assisted to provide learning opportunities to emerging artists and to seek to formalise this into an established programme of continued career development.

4. Continue to update a comprehensive database of those involved in the arts in the county and to use this information to improve networking in the sector and for the conveyance of up-to-date information on activities, events and opportunities that arise.

## **Objective 9**

### **Develop new and innovative arts programmes to encourage the development of the arts in the county**

#### **Actions**

1. Cultivate relationships with international partners to maintain and enhance the TRADE international artists' residency programme.
2. Work with Cinema Northwest, Screen Northwest and Leitrim Tourism to develop [www.leitrimfilm.ie](http://www.leitrimfilm.ie) as a portal for filmmakers who wish to work in the county to access information about the county, the services and supports available to filmmakers, and local and national opportunities available to the sector.
3. Develop, in association with Leitrim County Enterprise Board, a residency programme for artists to work in industrial and other business settings for the multiple purposes of providing new opportunities for artists to make work, for new audiences to engage with the arts, and for artists to contribute to the creative needs of companies.
4. Continue to develop, in association with NUI Galway, The International Literature Seminar on John McGahern as a programme to both celebrate the work of the author and to develop participation and appreciation of literature in the county generally.
5. Work with Leitrim Library Service to explore the development of a Literature Centre to support the development of writers, the wider appreciation of literature and providing a library of research material into the work of Leitrim authors.
6. Develop, in association with the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance, Leitrim Equation 3 as a programme to develop and promote traditional music in the county.
7. Explore the utilisation of interactive communication technologies as a means of widening the provision of arts programmes to schools, and other groups throughout the county.
8. Develop a comprehensive five year strategy for the utilisation of the percent for art scheme to run concurrently with this plan.
9. Implement innovative public art projects that uphold the highest standards in arts practice and collaboration with communities in accordance with an agreed public art strategy as opportunities arise.

## **Objective 10**

### **Continue to develop and maintain standards of excellence in the delivery of a Local Authority Arts Service**

#### **Actions**

1. Maintain and further develop a vibrant proactive local authority arts service which can respond to the needs of the community and carry out the actions of this plan in a timely and efficient manner.
2. Ensure that all programmes are effectively documented and evaluated.
3. Maintain an open door policy to artists, arts organisations and community and voluntary groups who wish to investigate the development of new initiatives in the arts.