



Image by Ste Murray

PROJECT ARTS CENTRE STRATEGY

WORK (2022 – 2026)

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WORK (2022 – 2026) sets out a bold statement for the future of Project Arts Centre and the ways in which we will create connections between artists and audiences over the next five years. *WORK (2022 – 2026)* is a call for change. It proposes a pathway towards: warmer, flexible and inclusive spaces; improved opportunities and conditions for artists and the public; and adequate resources to enable us to deliver on our ambitions. The new strategy recognises that change requires work, some of which is visible but much of it is hidden behind the scenes. It situates Project as a key place of work for the many different people whose voices can reflect, mediate, challenge and help shape our collective fate.

Where are we now?

It has been an extraordinary time. A year of challenge, change and opportunity. In the last year it has been brought home to us that Project does not exist independently but is entangled in a complex web of relations. We can't ignore the forces that shape our world or remain outside the conversations about how to address inequalities; we must play our part in building a liveable future for all of us. Over the last eighteen months, in addition to finding new ways to support artists and keep our audiences engaged, we have spent time interrogating the value of our work, pre-pandemic, throughout the crisis, and in the future where we urgently need to go now.

WORK (2022-2026) builds on our interim strategy for 2021, which raised questions about: the nature and importance of the 'arts centre'; the changing face of artist support; and the role of Project in a changing world. We have been thinking about urgency and the critical steps we must take to ensure that Project: remains a vital resource for artists; a welcoming home for audiences; and a beacon for new voices and radical ideas. *WORK* also builds on our recently published policy: *Towards Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (TEDI)*, which informs our overall approach to our work. *TEDI* confirms Project's commitment to becoming a more equitable, diverse, and inclusive space, physically and conceptually, with an increasingly transparent structure and a wider breadth of partnerships and connections.

Where have we been?

Project Arts Centre was founded in 1966 as Project 67. When the founders of Project Arts Centre came together, they did so with the philosophy that '*a creative person is capable of managing their own affairs.*' Project was an organisation set up, managed and governed by artists and although the world of arts funding and arts governance has become a lot more complex than it was in 1967, the artistic voice is still at the core of Project's identity. The founding spirit was centred on artists at a time when art was created by and for the establishment. Project became a home for the independents - artists whose work challenged that establishment. Project was created at a time of change in our country and in the wider world. Looking to the future is embedded in our DNA. Over the years Project's personality has always reflected these values, whether embracing the punk movement, presenting edgy contemporary performance or confounding audiences' ideas of what constitutes an exhibition. We are proud of this legacy but it can't weigh us down or hold us back; it is a history of reinvention, of evolution, of looking to the future, while reflecting on the present, and on change.

Where are we going?

In developing *WORK (2022 – 2026)*, we have focused on our welcome to artists and the public - the importance of care, respect and hospitality. We want to make sure that we create opportunities for many publics to interact in a physical and conceptual space which is safe and open to all. We believe the system within which we have been operating for many years is flawed and broken. So, we want to imagine something else. Something better! We want to create an arts space centred on the boldest, most exciting new ideas, while also ensuring we carry out this work with care, respect, and transparency, at every level of our institutional structure.

We're thinking about open doors. New people. Fresh ideas. Bravery. And Hope. Welcome!

1. Vision, Location, Mission and Values

Our vision: We believe in the value of an equitable, diverse, inclusive, sustainable artistic and social space, which buzzes with ideas and experimentation, connecting people in creative processes that engage with the messiness of lived experiences and question the status quo.

Where we are: Located in the heart of Dublin, Project Arts Centre is a physical and conceptual space where the contemporary arts and discourse are created and experienced, both on-site, and in locations across Ireland and the world.

Our mission is to be a vibrant, welcoming hub that connects a broad diversity of artists, audiences and local communities¹, promoting exchange, experimentation and collaboration, and the presentation of extraordinary work that inspires and provokes.

Key values that inform all of our work are:

- **The arts are essential** – for many of us, the arts make up the air we breathe and the way we make sense of the world.
- **The arts are transformative** – artists help to shape social and political consciousness
- Project Arts Centre is inspired by **contemporary, passionate, courageous voices from all parts of our diverse society** – and it is important that we reflect this, not just in our programming but in our organisational make-up.
- Resources are not equally accessible in the arts - **addressing inequality and accessibility** is both our responsibility and our opportunity
- **Trust** is the foundation stone on which creative relationships are built, and trust takes care, respect and time
- **Notions of quality and excellence in the arts are in constant motion** and need continual interrogation; the status quo is not an option
- **Partnership** – we are limited when we work on our own; we need to share knowledge, experience and skills for mutual benefit
- **Flexibility** assists Project to operate as a nimble, learning organisation
- There is a big world of artistic practice out there and we are enriched by **international influences and ideas**
- **Creative experimentation and risk make our hearts race and can inform creative practice** –even if things don't always work out as expected.

WORK (2022 – 2026) builds on our interim strategy, FLEX (2021), which focused on research and experimentation in three areas: experimental spaces; recalibrating artist supports; and the arts in a changing world. The strategy reflects the values and commitments outlined in our policy *Towards Equality, Diversity and Inclusion* published at the end of 2021, not only because we have a duty to deliver on these commitments but because we see it as a means of staying relevant, challenging and creatively exciting.

WORK (2022 – 2026) also takes account of the Arts Council's 10-year strategy, *Making Great Art Work* and the related three-year plan (2020 – 2022). It is also cognisant of Dublin City Council's aim 'to ensure the continued development of Dublin as a culturally vibrant, creative and diverse city with a broad range of cultural activities... underpinned by quality cultural infrastructure'. We align ourselves with the Gulbenkian framework for the civic role of arts centres, placing Project Arts Centre as a place of learning; debate; shared space; enlightenment & solace; and belonging.

¹ We recognise that many belong to all of these groups simultaneously and at different moments in time

2. Our WORK commitments and delivery plans for the next five years

WORK (2022 – 2026) has three key strands:

a. WORKing in Spaces

We occupy a 21-year old building at the heart of Dublin City, and a unique conceptual space in Ireland's artistic history and imagination. We recognise the urgent need to update our building to meet the needs of artists, audiences, local communities and staff. We also recognise the need to update the space we occupy conceptually, so that we continue to be a resource for experimentation, exchange and practice development, in a fast-changing local and international arts landscape.

We are committed to the development of:

- a vibrant, sustainable, flexible **physical space**, which is welcoming, inspiring and accessible for artists, audiences, staff and local communities.
- **a programming space** where a rich variety of contemporary theatre, dance and visual arts work is presented to the public, and where emerging experimental and cross disciplinary practices are prioritised
- **an online space** where we can: reach new audiences who may not be in a position to visit the building; offer more flexible ways to engage for existing audiences; and extend the opportunities for artists to connect, both nationally and internationally
- **a conceptual space** where: ideas and discourse are invited; assumptions are interrogated; artform boundaries are broken down; and art is recognised as a vital part of (rather than apart from) our messy, complicated lives

b. WORKing to Support and Connect people

At the heart of the creative process is connection, and our role as an arts centre reflects this. We are aware that we run the risk of falling into small networks of like-minded people, without even realising it. We want to take a fresh look at how we are structured, how we make decisions, and how we can constantly reach outwards instead of looking inwards. We also want to develop more nuanced communications strategies and a greater focus on transparency, that will enable us to develop better mutual understandings with artists of the future, build new and more diverse audiences, and nurture new relationships throughout the local community.

We are committed to:

- being a point of connection for **artists, audiences and local communities**
- ensuring artists are given **transparent** information about the types of processes and priorities we have in place when making programming decisions
- building on our bold, ambitious **audience engagement plan**, so that audiences and the general public are clear about the various ways they can engage with us, whether they are ticket buyers, exhibition attendees, participants in Project Potential or other public programming, or whether they are donors or supporters of another kind
- **a revised set of strategic artist supports** that prioritises artists with diverse lived experience working in experimental and cross art form practices
- building new points of connection with **international artists**
- ensuring that we have clear policies on **access** so that the widest pool of artists and audiences can engage with us and our work.

c. **WORKing with the necessary resources**

Having ambitious plans is all well and good as long as the right human, financial and other resources are in place to ensure we can deliver them. We plan to review our organisational structure to achieve maximum permeability and effectiveness, and to deepen and extend our strategic partnerships.

We are committed to the development of:

- a **permeable and effective organisational structure** with a Board, Members and Staff who increasingly reflect the diversity of knowledge, lived experience and arts practice that exists in Dublin City and in Ireland
- a more **robust financial and business model** which will allow us to maximise our current resources, examine future potential and deliver on our strategic ambitions
- a **stronger set of partnerships** that will enable us to broaden our knowledge and our reach.

3. Our WORK plan

a. WORKing in Spaces

- i. In order to develop a vibrant, sustainable, flexible **physical space**, which is welcoming, inspiring and accessible for artists, audiences, staff and local communities, we will:
 - Make initial changes to the layout, signage and décor in both public areas with a focus on hospitality and access
 - Implement our Masterplan for improved spaces with a particular focus on:
 - Improved physical access for artists, groups and the general public
 - A warmer entrance with the possibility of a cafe downstairs
 - improved development, performance and exhibition spaces for artists
 - Improved office and meeting spaces
 - develop a plan for developing and maintaining all areas of our building, and as many aspects of our operations and programming as possible, in a green, sustainable way
- ii. In order to create a **programming space** where a rich variety of contemporary theatre, dance and visual arts work is presented to the public, and emerging experimental and cross disciplinary practices are prioritised, we will:
 - Maintain our current role as a key venue for festivals, independent curators and companies, and a destination for audiences who want to see the best of new and exciting Irish & international contemporary arts
 - Introduce a broader range of programming strategies such as: collaborative approaches, open call processes, paid application opportunities for larger projects and a broader range of people on our selection panels
 - Create holistic strategies for programming so that all of our work with artists, whether in the building or in a variety of community contexts, is seen and understood as core artistic programme.
 - Invest in research & development with a specific focus on international experiences and practices
- iii. In order to develop an **online space** where we can: reach new audiences who may not be in a position to visit the building; offer more flexible ways to engage for existing audiences; and extend the opportunities for artists to connect, both nationally and internationally, we will:
 - Develop a Project Portal, which will be accessed through our website, which will host online and digital work (text, audio and film) commissioned by Project Arts Centre and available on demand
 - Develop programmes related to the portal with specific groups through the Project Potential programme
- iv. In order to develop a **conceptual space** where: ideas and discourse are invited; assumptions are interrogated; art form boundaries are broken down; and art is recognised as a vital part of (rather than apart from) our messy, complicated lives we will:
 - Develop a range of critical programmes examining: models of practice; perceptions of 'quality' in the arts; the place of the artist and art in society; the role of the contemporary arts centre; the

relationship between arts practice and social change; and strategies towards a more equitable arts sector.

- Further develop relationships with a range of social, civic, academic, community and arts partners, including Project Members, to build Project Arts Centre into a learning network where we can benefit from each other's experience, and where artists are at the very heart of civic research and discourse
- Review our Project Press imprint with a view to building partnerships for distribution of high quality critical texts examining artistic practice, research, discourse and critical thought.

b. WORKing to Support and Connect People

i. In order to become a **vibrant point of connection for artists, audiences and local communities**, we will:

- Deepen the audience experience by offering opportunities to meet the artists, producers and curators and learn more about their practice
- Deepen the relationship between audiences and the organisation by developing more opportunities to tour the building, meet the staff, engage in daytime events as well as attending exhibitions & evening shows
- Extend opportunities for discounted tickets for artists and local communities
- Extend the range of community, schools and public programming on offer including long and short-term partnerships; school/ community workshops and residencies; and the development of digital platforms
- Establish an annual Open Day to develop new relationships and remove some of the barriers which prevent people crossing our threshold.

ii. In order to ensure artists are given **transparent** information about the types of processes and priorities we have in place when making programming decisions, we will:

- Articulate clear programming policies and priorities across all areas of the work on our website, and direct artists and companies there for information
- Provide clear details of possible financial arrangements for artists including fees/ access provision etc.
- Advertise the multiple opportunities available to artists, audiences and local communities to work with us, participate in events, or become involved in longer term partnerships

iii. In order to build on our bold, ambitious **audience engagement plan**, developed in 2021, so that audiences and the general public are clear about the various ways they can engage with us, we will:

- Roll out a new a new digital strategy for the marketing & communications of our programme with clear, measurable objectives
- Roll out a new institutional communications plan, focussed on building the profile of Project Arts Centre and its leadership, again with clear, measurable objectives
- Build audience research into our day-to-day activities, maximising the potential of our box office system, social media channels and online resources (such as Google analytics).
- Build in clear markers for success and a process of constant evaluation to ensure we are meeting targets set for audiences, research and sales

- Partner with likeminded organisations & colleagues to build capacity around the development of audiences for international work in varying contexts, both in performance and the visual arts
- iv. In order to develop a **revised set of strategic artist supports** that prioritises early career/ emerging artists with diverse lived experience working in experimental and cross art form practices, we will:
- Review all Artist Support initiatives/ programmes
 - Develop a new suite of supports that meets current needs including a new artist development scheme with increased opportunities for artists from diverse backgrounds and those experimenting across performance and visual arts
 - Establish the Cube as a laboratory - a space where artists experiment with form and practice through structured residencies, developments, and mentorships.
- v. In order to extend and deepen our **points of connection with international artists**, we will:
- Develop models of presenting and touring international work, taking account of our strategic commitment to experimentation, partnership, audience development and sustainability.
- vi. To ensure that we have clear policies on **access** so that the widest pool of artists and audiences can engage with us and our work, we will
- Establish an access panel to assist in reviewing and monitoring our communications on an ongoing basis and ensure that all of our information is easy to find and available in multiple formats
 - Include accessible information on our structures as well as our programme i.e. how to get involved on the Board or as a Member as well as job opportunities etc.
 - Develop an improved and consistent access offering for artists working in the building and audiences attending work

c. **WORKing with the Necessary Resources**

- i. In order to build a **permeable and effective organisational structure** with a Board, Membership, and Staff who increasingly reflect the diversity of knowledge, lived experience and arts practice that exists in Dublin City and in Ireland, we will:
- review the make-up of the Board, Membership, and Staff and the recruitment processes we currently use for each
 - develop and apply a clear process for considering diversity in future recruitment
 - develop opportunities for Board members to meet critical thinkers to discuss emerging ideas around key priority areas such as international contemporary arts practice; equality, diversity and inclusion; and sustainability
 - increase contact with the membership both in person and online and extend invitations to think tanks, critical and social events, and opportunities to inform, represent and advocate for the organisation
 - increase the staff training budget and actively identify networking and training opportunities for staff in priority areas

- develop stronger links between staff and artists working in the building including talks/ presentations of work/ informal catch-up sessions
- ii. In order to develop a **more robust financial and business model** which will allow us to maximise our current resources, examine future potential and deliver on our strategic ambitions, we will:
- design realistic 5-year budgets which will map out the resources required to deliver this plan
 - engage with our key funding stakeholders, including the Arts Council and Dublin City Council, to further develop our relationships and clearly articulate Project's role in the local, national and international cultural landscape
 - develop a broader financial base for the organisation, with clear strategic plans for fundraising, philanthropy, and income development
- iii. In order to **strengthen and extend the strategic partnerships** that will enable us broaden our knowledge and reach, we will:
- Build relationships with a wider range of arts and civil-society partners to share information, ideas and experiences and develop collaborative approaches to developing, curating and programming work locally and internationally
 - Extend and deepen our partnership with key resource organisations (starting with Arts & Disability Ireland, GCN and Blanchardstown Traveller Development Group) in order to:
 - get a wider range of perspectives in terms of artforms, arts practices and audience development
 - extend our reach beyond current networks when recruiting/ doing open calls etc.
 - review our language and communications on an ongoing basis in line with best practice, with particular reference to our policy on equality, diversity and inclusion
 - assist us to remove any further physical, economic or social barriers that might deter engagement
 - source relevant and effective staff training opportunities

4. Monitoring and Evaluation

Work (2022-2026) is obviously a work in progress. It provides us with a map to take us through the next five years. However, if the pandemic has taught us anything, it is that the landscape can change dramatically without warning, so our plan for regular monitoring and evaluation will help us to maintain our course, even if we need to take some unexpected twists and turns along the way. Evaluation and monitoring processes will be ongoing and will involve: our staff; Board; Membership; artists; the public; and funders.

- **Staff** will develop a detailed implementation plan and will reflect upon and report on their progress both:
 - o Informally - on an ongoing basis in weekly staff meetings and as part of feedback sessions on individual projects or events.
 - o Formally – as part of a bi-annual review (over the next five years), which will be documented
- **The Board** will receive and consider progress report on the implementation of the strategy at every Board meeting (at least 6 times a year) including regular reports from the Artistic Director and Executive Director, and occasional reports from other members of staff. Following bi-annual staff reviews, the Board will get a formal update on progress, which will enable them to track and evaluate the extent to which the aims and objectives of the strategy are being achieved.
- **The Board** and **the Membership** will also be represented on the TEDI* Monitoring and Evaluation committee, which will also feed into the Board’s progress review twice a year, as the TEDI policy is closely woven through many elements of the strategy
- A report on the strategy be part of the agenda at **the Membership’s** annual colloquium (held each summer) over the next five years, for the purpose of discussion and feedback.
- A progress report on the strategy will feature in the Project Arts Centre Annual Report each year over the next five years, which will be made available to **the public**.
- The Project executive will invite feedback from **artists** and **the public** on specific elements of the strategy from time to time over the life of the strategy, and their feedback will be documented and considered by **staff** and **Board** and further action.
- Reports on the organisation’s progress on rolling out the strategy will be part of the annual funding applications made to the Arts Council and Dublin City Council, and the executive will be in ongoing dialogue with **funders** in relation to the outcomes and impacts each year.