



**Leitrim County Council**  
**Culture & Creativity Strategy**  
Take a closer look

**2018-2022**

Clár Éire Ildánach  
Creative Ireland  
Programme  
2017-2022





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# 01 Cathaoirleach's foreword

- Finola Armstrong-McGuire

“ Leitrim is unique in many ways.

To some extent its culture and heritage has been forged from its geography - a rugged landscape of thin soil that was challenging to farm and hills with shallow seams of coal and iron ore. It is partly as a consequence of this that Leitrim has the smallest population of any county in Ireland but dispersed over a relatively large area that stretches from the midlands of the country to the northwest coast.

As a local authority this presents us with many challenges in terms of service delivery. However, in equal measure our small size has often been an advantage in many ways, consensus more easily reached, with an agility to grasp new opportunities that improve the livelihoods of our citizens.

Creativity has always been, and will continue to be, a vital asset in meeting those challenges into the future. Technology is evolving at an exponential rate and how we live and work will evolve in hand with those advances. One of our biggest challenges has seen our young adults move from the rural northwest to larger urban areas here in Ireland or elsewhere in the world in order to develop sustainable careers. While on one hand there is a drive towards urbanisation, on the other hand as international travel becomes increasingly accessible, and the speed of our broadband the only impediment to international communication, many people will increasingly be able to base themselves anywhere they wish. In that context, the quality of life to be found in Leitrim will render the county that much more attractive. Such ways of working are particularly prevalent in the creative sector and for everybody the rich cultural offering provided by those who work in the sector is a key factor when other people assess quality of life in a given location.

Creativity is an essential skill and a mindset that every young person should be encouraged to develop in order to meet the challenges of their rapidly evolving future. Communities and individuals of all ages can develop a sense of self, confidence and a shared understanding through creative expression and every effort should be made to provide them with that opportunity.

In Leitrim we are very lucky to have so many gifted people working in the area of culture and creativity. Working with these talented individuals and communities the length and breadth of the county, I have no doubt that this strategy will prove to be a remarkable opportunity to do much that can improve the livelihoods of all our citizens.

Creativity is an essential skill and a mindset that every young person should be encouraged to develop in order to meet the challenges of their rapidly evolving future.







## 02 Chief Executive's foreword

- Lar Power

“ A central theme of Creative Ireland is collaboration...

- collaboration between central and local government, collaboration with artists, collaboration with communities – in order to facilitate an ecosystem of creativity and to nurture the creative imagination through active engagement with the arts and culture.

Leitrim County Council recognises the value and importance of the arts, creativity, culture and heritage. We have seen how investment in the creative sector has paid dividend in terms of the social capital it builds and how it improves the lives of our citizens and grows pride. While this is invaluable to people of all ages who can engage in the arts, explore their creativity and our culture and heritage, it's also a vital asset that brings real direct and indirect economic benefits.

This initiative is coming at a very opportune time for Leitrim County Council. As we enter into a new framework agreement with the Arts Council and adopt new multi-annual strategies for development of the arts and the library service and a new strategy for the diaspora, we are in a unique position to ensure that the priorities identified can be designed to be incorporated into service delivery across the organisation and with partner agencies and organisations.

Creative Ireland is a great opportunity to build on this and a great opportunity to bring all those strands together. Creative Ireland is ambitious, but given the dividend that can accrue, it is wholly appropriate that we would seize the opportunity now so that communities and individuals across the county, as well as future generations, get to reap that benefit.

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## 03 Culture & Creativity in Leitrim

Leitrim as a county is regarded for its unspoilt landscape, culturally vibrant, rich in heritage and remarkable, relative to its size, for its levels of activity and capacity across a wide range of artforms and cultural arenas.

The Book of Invasions describes the Tuatha Dé Danann arriving in Mesolithic Ireland through the air before landing their floating-ships on the summit of Sliabh an Iarainn, where they first encounter the Fir Bolg and meet below the mountain at Magh Rein around Fenagh. This site would centuries later become one of the first and most important monastic sites in Ireland dating back to the earliest period of Celtic monasticism and celebrated for its divinity school, which was attended by students from every part of Europe.

The celebrated composer Turlough O'Carolan lived in Leitrim and was inspired by the people and folklore of the county with one of his best-known compositions *Sí Beag, Sí Mor* recalling the two fairy hills near Carrick on Shannon. John McKenna remains one of the most influential Irish flute players who after emigrating to the United States became the first Irish flute player to be recorded there. The singer Nan Fitzpatrick from Aughavas was the first Irish woman to be recorded commercially having made three 78s in New York in the 1920s before returning to Ireland in 1932. John McGahern, who also lived near Fenagh, is probably Leitrim's most famous cultural icon and is one of Ireland's most respected and celebrated authors and is critically acclaimed internationally.

But while some of Leitrim's cultural vibrancy goes back many generations, and some of its most noted

exponents renowned leaders in their fields, other factors are more recent and have different origins and there are many more practitioners based here that are held in the highest regard within Leitrim and further afield.

From the 1850s until the year 2000, the population of Leitrim continued to decline. By the early 1980s relative property prices coupled with the county's unspoilt landscape gave rise to the migration of artists and other cultural pioneers from other parts of Ireland, the UK and continental Europe who saw in Leitrim a location where they could afford to sustain their livelihoods. These individuals who helped ensure schools remained open and renovated houses that were left idle were a welcome contrast to the prevailing narrative up to that point.

In the 1990s a group of artists in Manorhamilton sought to develop better facilities in which they could make their work resulting in the establishment of Leitrim Sculpture Centre, which today provides the widest array of material processes of any facility in Ireland to make art. At the same time another community group in Manorhamilton was developing the Glens Centre Theatre and in Carrigallen, the Cornmill Theatre was being built.

By the turn of the millennium Leitrim County Council had developed supports for communities who wanted to engage in the arts and increased its provision for the professional development of artists that would in time



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lead to the development of programmes such as LOCIS and Creative Frame. Leitrim County Enterprise Board had developed Leitrim Design House and a wide range of product development and business training programmes including multiannual cross-border programmes such as LiveCraft and Harnessing Creativity. Through the government's capital development scheme, Leitrim County Council redeveloped the old courthouse in Carrick on Shannon to become the Dock Arts Centre, which continues to be a flagship of Leitrim and Leitrim County Council, and one of the cornerstones of the region's arts infrastructure.

The Western Development Commission's 2009 report 'Creative West' noted that the percentage of people employed in the creative sector in Leitrim was 4.4% - the highest in the WDC region and today the numbers of people working in the sector, level of activity, infrastructure and the opportunities for practitioners has reached a critical mass and the creative sector is viewed as a key component of social, cultural and economic development. While the scope of most individuals within the creative sector to employ further people or become major direct economic drivers is limited, the majority of all enterprises in Leitrim are small one and two person businesses and as such supporting those who work in the creative sector to develop sustainable careers is considered as valid and deserving of support as any other sector, industry or endeavour.

In recent years Spark and Harnessing Creativity have also demonstrated how programmes designed to explore creativity can have a positive impact on innovation in business and service delivery. While this can lead to the adoption of new approaches to service delivery within a company, in most cases the impacts are principally related to the increased value and emphasis on creative thinking that collaboration with artists generates. Participation rates in the arts by the wider community are equally high with Leitrim having one of the highest rates of participation in youth theatre and increasing levels of participation by schools and community groups in arts and culture activities.

In places like Leitrim where cultural activities form a strong point of identification, the arts and the wider culture and creative sector can make a significant contribution to our regional identity. Programmes like the traditional arts project Leitrim Equation and the Iron Mountain Literature Festival use the landscape, history and cultural heritage of Leitrim to explore contemporary themes of place, home and identity, while the work of venues such as The Dock and the Glens Centre, the Creative Ireland Open Call programme and Music



Generation all provide platforms for communities of different ages and interests across the county to explore their creativity to the fullest extent possible.

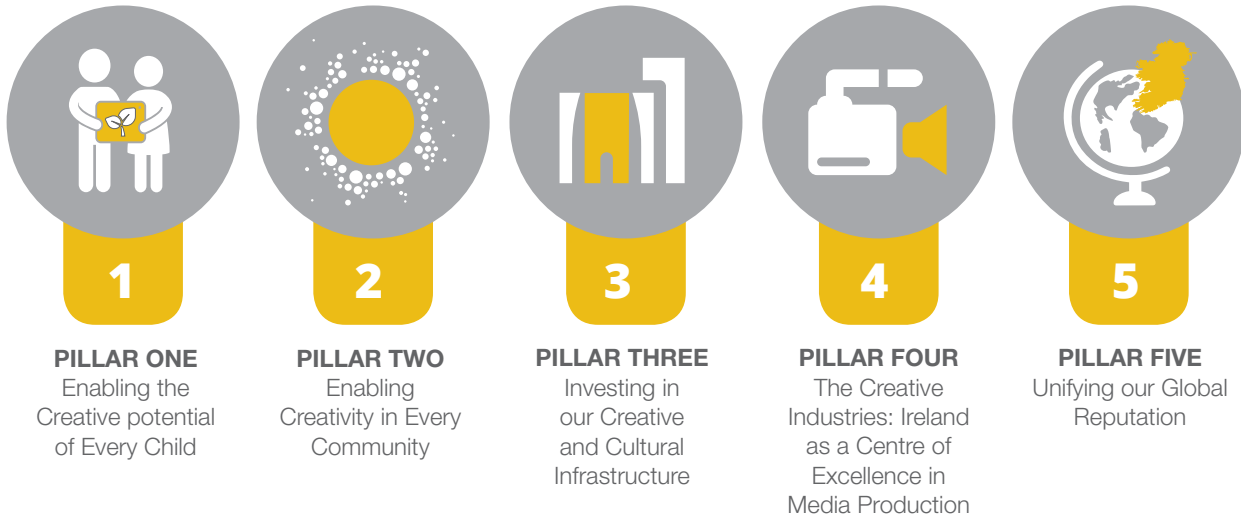
Together these initiatives endorse the idea that while the creative sector plays a central function in the cultural wellbeing of the county, it also has vast implications socially and economically, the three strands of which are inherently intertwined. While strict definitions of what constitutes culture or the creative sector are often problematic, there is no doubt that it has been the creativity of many people down through the centuries that has forged our culture and which has become our heritage.

It is in this context that the 'all-of-government' ethos of Creative Ireland at a national level has proven to be a valuable approach and starting point in the development of this strategy. In supporting the development of the creativity of communities and individuals today, we not only support the continued social, cultural and economic development of the county, we also ensure the continued development of our own creativity and a vibrant culture and rich heritage for future generations.



## 04 The Creative Ireland Vision for Leitrim

The vision of Creative Ireland is that every person in Ireland will have the opportunity to fully realise his or her creative potential. The vision is pursued through the Five-Pillars of the Creative Ireland Programme:



Participation and access are central to the vision. Connecting artists and other creators to communities is also regarded as essential to realising the vision.

In order to arrive at a Creative Ireland Vision for Leitrim, Leitrim County Council established a **Culture Team** coordinated by Mary Quinn, Director of Services, and consisting of Emma Clancy, County Librarian; Paul Cunningham, Head of Marketing, The Dock; Philip Delamere, Arts Officer; Vivienne Egan, Senior Executive Planner; and Geraldine Reynolds, Senior Enterprise Development Officer, Local Enterprise Office.

The team put in place a series of public consultation meetings which sought the opinion and vision of those involved in the culture and creativity sector, and from the general public. The team also drew from the outcomes of a previous similar process undertaken as part of the Upper Shannon Erne Future Economy Programme which as part of its research sought to explore opportunities for development and growth in the creative sector. The findings from those processes were distilled by the Culture Team into a series of priorities and action areas as outlined in this document and the following vision statement created that encapsulated the ethos of that process.







The Creative Ireland Vision for Leitrim is to nurture and foster creative expression in all its diversity; embrace and welcome new ideas; and create the conditions to help turn those ideas into reality and embed creativity into all aspects of the social, economic and cultural life of Leitrim.

Our vision is underpinned by the commitments within the key strategic plans for Leitrim which are:

2014  
- 2019

**Leitrim County Council  
Corporate Plan, 2014-2019**

“To make Leitrim a sustainable, creative, inclusive County where individuals, family and business can flourish.”

2015  
- 2021

**Leitrim Local Economic and  
Community Plan 2015-2021**

“Leitrim, A Vibrant County with Big Ambition ... where our communities are safe and healthy, our resources and heritage are sustained and our economy is thriving.”

2012  
- 2017

**Leitrim Arts Plan 2012-2017**

“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.”



...nurture and foster  
creative expression in  
all its diversity...

## 05 The Creative Ireland Values in Leitrim

The Creative Ireland values of Collaboration, Communication, Community, Participation, Inclusivity and Empowerment have informed the development of this strategy.

In the first instance the Creative Ireland programme is a significant and meaningful demonstration of collaboration between local and national government in the area of culture and creativity. Within Leitrim County Council, the development of a Culture & Creativity Strategy and programme has given rise to enhanced collaboration across different departments within the organisation where culture and creativity are seen as vital contributors to social, cultural and economic development into the future.

While the process of developing the strategy has been collaborative in nature in the broadest sense, the measures included in the programme, and the Creative Ireland Open Call in particular, are designed to encourage a wider collaboration between the local authority, practitioners in the sector, and communities of place or interest across the entire county.

### Creativity is an empowering characteristic or skillset for any individual or community...

Communication is key to achieving these ambitions. This will involve using all means at our disposal including local press and radio, community networks and online resources to provide access to information for all members of communities in Leitrim. We will also seek to enhance communication between community groups and practitioners in the culture and creativity sectors. Finally we will institute means by which practitioners and groups can communicate effectively with the local authority, providing us with the opportunity to continually develop the programme in partnership with all stakeholders.

Creativity is an empowering characteristic or skillset for any individual or community, enabling confidence in expression, awareness of our environment, and openness to new things. The programme itself and the projects supported under this strategy are designed to be inclusive in nature, encouraging the participation of everyone, particularly groups and individuals who may not have had the opportunity to do so before.





# 06 The Strategic Priorities for Leitrim

A primary purpose of this five-year strategy is to create a joined up and cross-departmental approach within Leitrim County Council to the development of creativity in the county that will:

- Build awareness of the value of creativity across Leitrim County Council.
- Align the individual culture-related strategies in Leitrim County Council.
- Better harness the potential of the creative sector to impact positively on the social, cultural and economic development of the county.

The process of identifying the priorities for this strategy has been achieved through public consultation, alignment of existing local authority strategies with the Creative Ireland strategy led by a culture team made up of inter-departmental representatives of enterprise, planning, heritage, libraries and the arts.

The key strategies informing the development of this strategy include:

- Leitrim County Council Corporate Plan 2014-2019
- Leitrim County Council Arts Development Plan 2012-2017
- Leitrim County Council Local Economic and Community Plan 2016-2021

The Strategic Priorities align to specific work areas and desired outcomes contained within these plans. They also take into account the available external resources, opportunities and capacity of the Local Authority to deliver sustainable impact, community engagement and new forms of collaboration and inter-disciplinary work.

**The five strategic priority areas of Leitrim's Culture and Creativity strategy are:**



**CREATIVE  
POTENTIAL**



**CREATIVE  
COMMUNITY**



**CREATIVE  
PLACE**



**CREATIVE  
CONNECTIONS**



**CREATIVE  
ENTERPRISE**

## **CREATIVE POTENTIAL**

To contribute to every child's development by providing access to and engagement with creative activities and opportunities to explore different forms of creative expression.

### **Key Goals:**

- Continue to work in partnership with various stakeholders who work with children, to increase opportunities for children and young people to explore their own creativity through high quality innovative programmes.
- Support those who work in the creative sector to develop the skills necessary to develop high quality projects and programmes for children and young people.
- Encourage the development of cross disciplinary projects and programmes that link creativity with science, technology, the environment and civic society.

### **Key Departments:**

Arts, Libraries, Environment, Community Development, Local Enterprise Office.

### **Partners and Collaborators:**

Leitrim Public Participation Network (PPN); Sligo/Leitrim Children & Young People Services Committee (CYPSC); North Connacht Youth Services (NYCS); Mayo, Sligo & Leitrim Education and Training Board (MSLETB); Carrick on Shannon Education Centre; Leitrim Childcare Committee; Foróige and all arts, cultural and community venues and organisations.



## CREATIVE COMMUNITY

To provide opportunities for communities throughout Leitrim to explore their own creativity through promoting greater access and inclusion to the wide range of creative activities and cultural infrastructure and resources across the county.

### Key Goals:

- Encourage the development of opportunities for communities to explore their creativity through innovative projects that contribute to quality of life, health and well-being.
- Encourage the development of opportunities for communities to celebrate their distinct cultural heritage, traditions and the Irish language through programmes, events and festivals.
- Create opportunities for those who work in the creative sector to work with a wide number of community groups and organisations across the county.

### Key Departments:

Community Development, Arts, Libraries, Heritage, Planning.

### Partners and Collaborators:

PPN, Leitrim Development Company, Community Councils; Older Persons Council; Leitrim Association for People with Disabilities (LAPWD); Leitrim Disability Network; Northwest LGBTQI; IFA (Leitrim); Macra na Feirme (Leitrim); Leitrim Sports Partnership and all arts, cultural and community venues and organisations.



## CREATIVE PLACE

To recognise the value of our outstanding rich and diverse natural landscape, heritage, cultural infrastructure and the scale of our creative sector as vital resources and sources of inspiration for creative practitioners and the wider community.

### Key Goals:

- Continue to support those working in the creative sector in developing authentic, new and innovative ideas, programmes and projects that find their inspiration and roots in the distinct culture and landscape of Leitrim.
- To enhance the capacity and role of libraries, arts centres, creative infrastructure, built heritage and natural environment as focal points for individuals and communities to explore their creativity.
- Promote and raise awareness of the rich and vibrant arts, design, heritage and natural landscape assets of Leitrim and strengthen its identity as a creative place to live, work and visit.

### Key Departments:

- Arts, Libraries, Environment, Planning, Heritage, ICT, Local Enterprise Office, Tourism.

### Partners and Collaborators:

The Dock; Leitrim Sculpture Centre; The Glens Centre; Leitrim Design House; FabLab Manorhamilton; Heritage groups; Environmental Groups; Festivals; other arts and community venues and organisations.



## CREATIVE CONNECTIONS

To support the creative sector in growing its national and global footprint through national and international linkages enhancing Leitrim's reputation as a centre of creativity.

### Key Goals:

- Continue to grow opportunities for enhanced networking and collaboration at national and international level in order to foster and encourage the exchange of skills, expertise and ideas and to maximise opportunities to increase participation by Leitrim practitioners internationally.
- Maximise the opportunities for international collaboration through various programmes such as Creative Europe and Culture Ireland and by working in partnership with various agencies and partners including the Leitrim diaspora.
- Explore the potential for the development of events in the creative sector of sufficient quality and significance to attract national and international creative practitioners to Leitrim.



**Key Departments:**

Arts, Library, Local Enterprise Office, Tourism, Economic Development.

**Partners and Collaborators:**

Leitrim Sculpture Centre, The Dock, International Leitrim Associations, Leitrim Diaspora Group; Leitrim Tourism.

**CREATIVE ENTERPRISE**

To strengthen and develop Leitrim's capacity as a creative hub and cultural cluster and enhance potential for economic development and sustainability in the Creative and Culture Sector.

**Key Goals:**

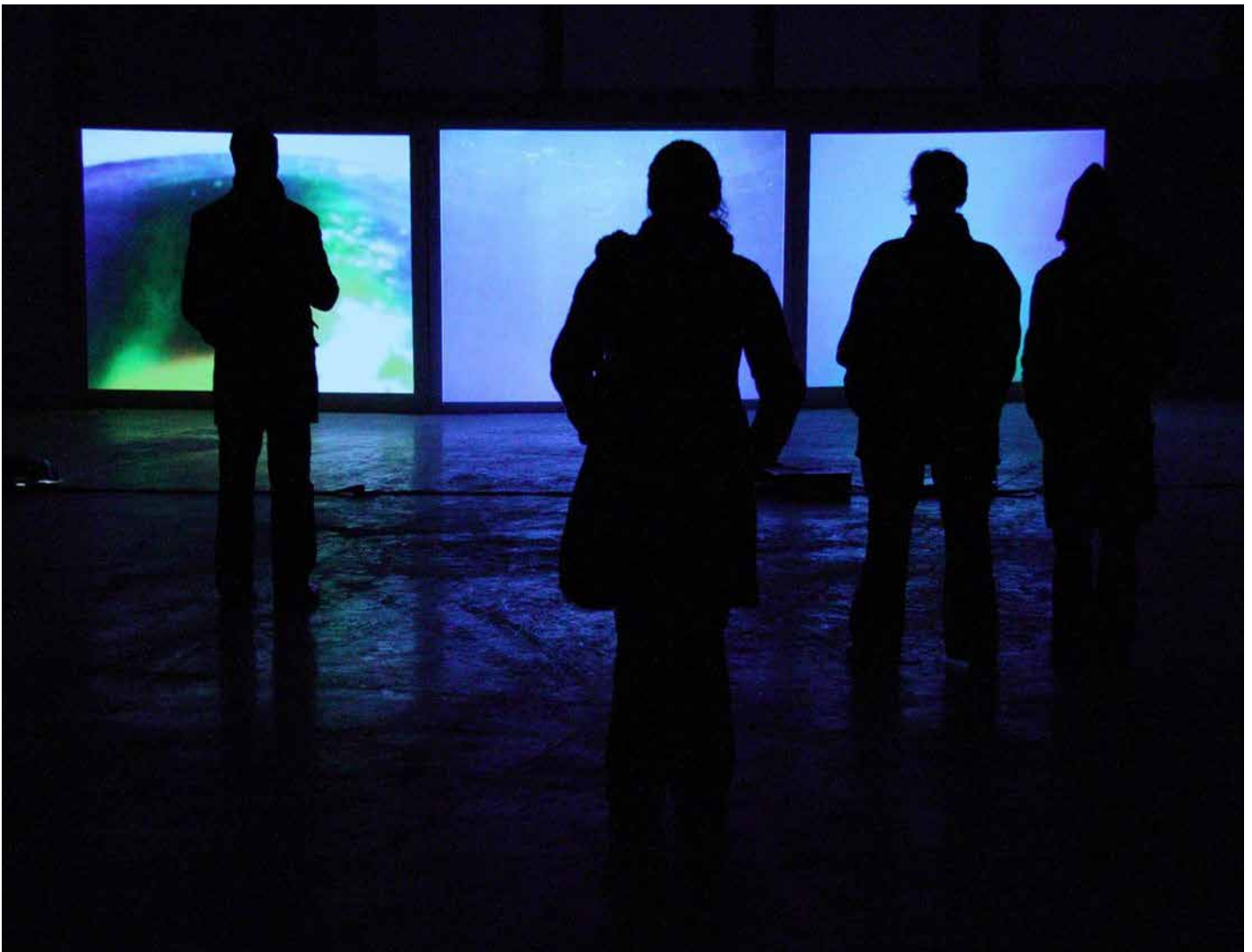
- Strengthen and develop business supports, training and mentoring opportunities for the creative sector to enable them to develop sustainable practise and business.
- Harness and incentivise the potential of public, private and community sectors to grow employment and earning opportunities in the creative sector through innovative programmes and awareness raising.
- Grow and develop the critical mass of the creative sector in Leitrim through hubs, co-working spaces and introduction of high speed broadband across the county.

**Key Departments:**

Economic Development, Local Enterprise Office, Arts, Libraries, Housing.

**Partners and Collaborators:**

Leitrim Development Company, Chambers of Commerce, MSLETB, IT Sligo.



## 07 Implementation

The Culture and Creative Strategy for Leitrim is a forward looking document that sets out the building blocks for achieving long term sustainable development across the local authority to harness the potential of creativity and maximise its contribution to our cultural, economic and social well-being.



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Leitrim County Council recognises that it cannot deliver this Culture and Creative Strategy alone.

- We will **build** upon existing relationships with external organisations and agencies and develop new partnerships to support the delivery of the Culture and Creative Strategy emphasising the strong links and inter-dependencies that are central to building vibrant creative communities.
- We will **develop** a strong, evidence-based assessment of Leitrim's creative sector to deepen our understanding of its contribution to the cultural, social and economic life of the county.
- We will **audit and map** the cultural and creative sector and develop a baseline of activity for future progress and development.
- We will **evaluate** the impacts of the measures contained in this strategy within the local authority and in the wider community to ensure it remains fit for purpose.
- We will put transparent and robust **measures in place** to ensure that all programme and activities supported through our Cultural and Creative Strategy are transparent, accountable and understood by all.





## 08 Key Actions

### Contribute to Strategic Planning

A central purpose of Leitrim County Council's Culture and Creativity Strategy is to act as guidance and a key influencer in the development of all cultural policies and corporate planning developed during the tenure of the Creative Ireland programme. In 2018, Leitrim County Council will publish a new strategy for development of the arts and enter into a new framework agreement with the Arts Council. It will commence the development of a new library strategy and will develop a Diaspora strategy in partnership with Sligo and Roscommon County Councils. In these, Leitrim county Council will take cognisance of the objectives and agenda contained in this strategy and seek to ensure that they are incorporated into that planning.

### Cruinniú na nÓg

Cruinniú na nÓg is a new all Ireland celebration of creativity for young people which will be held on the last Saturday in June each year each year. Venues, arts, culture & heritage groups, crèches, schools, scouting, Foróige and any organisation with the capacity to organise or host high quality events that encourages the creativity of children and young people are invited to become involved. Applications must be developed by a community group, venue or organisation in partnership with organisations or individuals with professional expertise of working with young people in any creative or cultural arena such as visual or performing arts, literature, heritage or other culture area. Applications are assessed on the basis of the quality of the events planned, their likely impact on those involved and how well they help fulfil the vision and achieve the strategic objectives of Leitrim's Culture and Creativity Strategy.

### Creative Ireland Open Call

The Creative Ireland Open Call is a countywide open call to community groups, organisations, venues, artists, writers, performers, archaeologists, historians, archivists and everyone involved in the culture and creative sectors to develop high quality projects and programmes that develop and encourage creativity and greater access, knowledge and appreciation of the arts, culture and heritage.

Applications must be developed by a community group, venue or organisation in partnership with individuals with professional expertise in any creative or cultural arena such as visual or performing arts, literature, heritage or other culture area. A group may make the initial approach to a professional in the culture/creativity sectors with a view to developing a project or visa-versa. The project may be designed to principally impact on those directly involved in the project or to have a broader reach, benefiting a wider community.



Applications are assessed on the basis of how well they help fulfil the vision and achieve the strategic objectives of Leitrim's Culture and Creativity Strategy using the following criteria:

- Quality, innovation and creativity of the planned project.
- Understanding of the social and cultural context of the project.
- Proven ability of the group to undertake and manage projects.
- Level of skills and expertise of culture/creativity professionals engaged with the group.
- Examples of potential projects could include, but are not limited to, the following:
  - Projects that encourage people to explore their own creativity, particularly young people.
  - Projects that enhance the sustainability of those who work in the culture and creativity sectors.
  - Projects that explore the arts, culture and heritage in creative and innovative ways.
  - One-off projects or events in performing or visual arts, literature, culture or heritage.
  - Workshops, talks or lectures in performing or visual arts, literature, culture or heritage.
  - Commissions for new work.

For both Cruinniú and the Open Call we particularly welcome project proposals that involve groups that have had little or no previous involvement in creativity and culture projects arising from any barrier such as economic, geographic, or having lacked awareness or opportunity. In such instances we will endeavour to give whatever advice and assistance we can to ensure your project can achieve the best possible experience for everyone involved.

2018 is the European year of cultural heritage, the centenary of women's suffrage and the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of Conradh na Gaeilge and as such this year we welcome innovative applications that creatively explore the concerns that underpin these programmes and anniversaries.



In Leitrim we are very lucky to have so many gifted people working in the area of culture and creativity. Working with these talented individuals and communities ... will prove to be a remarkable opportunity to do much that can improve the livelihoods of all our citizens.

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