

Mermaid Arts Centre

STRATEGIC PLAN 2021 - 2025

Foreword

In their recent essay *On Connection*, author, poet and recording artist Kae Tempest observes:

Connection is collaborative [...] We, the readers or listeners, are crucial to the text, story or song becoming powerful. We are not impartial observers; we are a fundamental part of the circuitry; if we are not connected, the charge will not be able to flow.

[...] for the connection to happen, the creator of work, the work itself, and the person who will take that work on so that it will come to life need to be equally activated, conducting the energy, so the bulb can light up....

This plan outlines the measures that the board and executive will take over the course of the next five years to ensure that Mermaid can continue to create such connections, can become increasingly inclusive in our ways of working and can grow in such a way that we can sustainably increase the available opportunities for artists and audiences to connect.

About Us

Our Purpose: Creating Connection.

Mermaid Arts Centre is County Wicklow’s creative powerhouse. Since 2002, our building has been a celebratory stage for artists and communities locally. Our work connects artists and communities across County Wicklow in exchanging artistic experiences that spark curiosity, delight and debate, while fostering pride, pleasure and well-being.

Our purpose is driven by a fundamental belief in the power of shared experience and connection in combatting loneliness and isolation among people, and in the right to freedom of artistic expression and creation for all.

Our Vision

To deepen Mermaid’s roots in the community as an arts centre that champions access to art and creativity for all; to make Mermaid more sustainable by becoming increasingly relevant to more people – whether the artistic community or the community at large; to enable as many citizens of Wicklow as possible to feel a sense of ownership over or belonging to Mermaid.

Our Values

Our values are central to how we think and how we work. At Mermaid, we value:

Imagination

We prize imagination as the well-spring of creativity, resourcefulness and empathy. It enables us to ask “what if”, to imagine, and to dream. It is at the heart of our spirit of open-mindedness and innovation, driving us forward.

Inclusion

We are committed to being welcoming, kind and supportive to all those who work with us or visit us, striving for solidarity, connection and inclusion within our organisation and the wider community.

Collaboration

We believe in collaboration and cooperation, sharing our knowledge and resources generously, and developing partnerships from a place of openness.

Excellence

We strive for professionalism in our work, and take pride in being recognised as a leading arts organisation delivering excellence in cultural experiences as part of a vital national and local arts infrastructure.

Integrity

When we make a commitment, we honour it. We believe in accountability and fairness. We run our business efficiently and sustainably. We uphold our values in everything we do.

Our Work

We implement our purpose and live our values by:

- Gathering artists and audiences together to create, participate in and enjoy unforgettable artistic experiences.
- Providing an artist-led creative hub and artistic resource for artists and companies in County Wicklow, working in both professional and amateur contexts.
- Sustaining the work of artists through employment opportunities, advocacy and practical supports for their creative development.
- Enriching the lives of all communities in County Wicklow through the creation, co-creation and presentation of a diverse programme of excellent contemporary arts experiences.

Our Strategic Goals

These goals are underpinned by our vision to be a more sustainable organisation by ensuring we are inclusive of, and relevant for, as much of our community as possible. These goals outline a sustainable, inclusive and developmental approach to this vision across our activities, through our people, facilities, services, events and experiences.

Goal 1

Champion Artists: contribute to a sustainable and inclusive future for artists and the arts economy in County Wicklow, and nationally, through meaningful partnership, dialogue and maintaining an artist-centred approach to our work.

Goal 2

Increase Relevance: affirm Mermaid as an arts and cultural resource which is inclusive and representative of all citizens of Wicklow, through redoubling our commitment to equity, diversity and inclusive arts practices, increasing opportunities for public engagement countywide, and honing our communications.

Goal 3

Maximise Mermaid's impact: ensure we have the capacity and resources to deliver on our ambitions sustainably.

Goal 1: Champion Artists

Contribute to sustainable and inclusive future for artists and the arts economy in County Wicklow, and nationally, through meaningful partnership, dialogue and maintaining an artist-led approach to provision of supports.

Why this goal

Artists make enormous contributions to society by offering us reflective spaces to consider our shared world, by making work that draws us together, exhilarates us, illuminates ideas and feelings, and in so doing play an important role in producing civic pride and well-being. There is no Arts Centre without artists. However, artists face increasingly steep challenges in accessing support and space and around pay and conditions. The actions below seek to contribute to stemming the flow of artists either out of the sector, the country, or both.

Objectives

1. Work with professional artists and cultural stakeholders to understand diverse needs, create responses and enhance support for sustainable creative/cultural career development.
2. Retain and develop artist-led programmes.
3. Grow producing and curating capacity in Mermaid to increase practical supports for artists.
4. Ensure Mermaid facilities are fit for professional practice & development work by artists of all abilities.

Note: these objectives are further broken down into actions in our Strategic Implementation Plan.

Measures of this goal being achieved

- Mermaid is a recognised leader in relation to working conditions, pay, and sustainable career development for artists.
- Mermaid has an understanding of the barriers to access for artists from all backgrounds and actively works to remove these barriers.
- Artist-led programmes including TRANSFORM Associate Artist Scheme and GAP DAY are fully funded and appropriately staffed.
- Mermaid has inhouse staff working alongside CEO dedicated to producing, curation and participation.
- Mermaid has a strong, clear artistic policy that is widely understood and informed by the artistic community in Wicklow and beyond.
- Mermaid resources and facilities are fully accessible and fit for purpose and continue to be made available to artists for professional practice development as support-in-kind.
- More artists are supported to make work in their own county.

Goal 2: Increase Relevance

Affirm Mermaid as an arts and cultural resource which is inclusive, and representative of all citizens of Wicklow, through increasing opportunities for public engagement countywide, honing our communications, and redoubling our commitment to equity, diversity and inclusive arts practices.

Why this goal

We believe absolutely in the right to freedom of artistic expression and creation for all. We believe that one of the major imperatives for artistic innovation right now, is less about innovation in artistic form but rather about the innovations we make around who has access to art, to the making of art and to artistic discourse. This goal is informed by the emphasis in the wider policy context on the necessity for publicly funded arts and culture to be characterised by greater access, participation and collaboration, but our actions are driven by a fundamental belief in the power of shared experience.

Objectives

1. Establish a Change Plan which articulates our commitment to inclusive best practices throughout our organisation and our activities.
2. Deepen our relationship with existing audiences and grow new audiences by building on existing excellence in Mermaid programme and presenting programme more widely and with more diverse communities in County Wicklow
3. Develop a communications strategy that strongly articulates Mermaid's story and brand narrative and includes a digital strategy alongside an implementation plan for communications on organisational activities.

Note: these objectives are further broken down into actions in our Strategic Implementation Plan.

Measures of this goal being achieved

- Diverse communities all over County Wicklow feel a stronger sense of ownership over their local arts centre and its activities.
- There is an increase in the number of people who rate Mermaid's work as relevant to their lives in County Wicklow.
- More people can quickly describe what Mermaid is and does.
- Mermaid has an Of/By/For All Change Plan in operation as an inclusive engagement model for development of new programme initiatives.
- Mermaid has strong community partnerships and is working openly and effectively with local communities in the regular co-creation and presentation of programme countywide.
- Mermaid is regularly presenting programme offsite in locations countywide and this work is fully funded.

Goal 3: Maximise Impact

Maximise Mermaid's impact by ensuring we have the capacity and resources to deliver on our ambitions sustainably.

Why this goal

We are living through an era of unprecedented change in terms of both the post-Covid recovery and the ongoing impact of climate change. We wish to do more to respond to these challenges, but to do more, Mermaid needs to organise for impact. It is imperative that we balance growth with stability as we reckon with these changes and grow our income sustainably, alongside growing the team, improving working conditions and futureproofing the building, so that artists, staff and communities all benefit from that growth. The objectives below ensure that Mermaid has, and sustains for the future, appropriate capacity, capability and resources.

Objectives

1. Increase income levels sustainably across all sources over the lifetime of this plan
2. Restore sustainability and capacity within the Mermaid team by addressing staffing levels, training, pay & conditions
3. Ensure Mermaid demonstrates leadership and best practice in governance

Note: these objectives are further broken down into actions in our Strategic Implementation Plan.

Measures of this goal being achieved

- We will have grown earned income by 5% from 2019 levels by 2025.
- We will have increased levels of public subsidy from major stakeholders.
- We will have restored income from fundraising efforts to €15K by end 2023 with a Giving Strategy in place and a positive outlook for growing this stream.
- Company reserves will reflect a value of 6 months operating funds by end of plan.
- The organisation will be fortified with a strong governance structure and robust management systems in place.
- We will have the expertise, skill and resilience at board and executive level to deliver on our strategic ambitions with a CPD plan in operation.
- We will have expanded our team by 2 FTE staff members and established a pension scheme & 3% wage increase.

Wider Policy Context

This plan is informed by several important policy frameworks and actions at local, national and international level.

- From Dept. of Arts & Culture: *Life Worth Living*: The Report of the Arts and Culture Recovery Taskforce 2021. Download report [here](#)
- From Dept. of Arts & Culture: *Culture 2025*. Full policy doc [here](#)
- Project Ireland 2040 National Development [Plan](#) (see p. 70 re: improvement of regional arts infrastructure)
- Wicklow County Council Arts Office Strategic [Plan](#)
- Arts Council *Making Great Art Work* Strategic Plan. Full text [here](#).
- Arts Council policies such as [Paying The Artist](#), and [Equality, Human Rights, Diversity](#)
- Arts Council review of Arts Centres 2019. Full text [here](#)
- European Workplan for Culture 2019 – 2022, which articulates actions around sustainability in cultural heritage; Cohesion and well-being; an ecosystem supporting artists, cultural and creative professionals and European content - more detail [here](#)
- The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 2030, which articulate many actions around decent work, equal pay, sustainable communities, climate action and accountable and inclusive institutions. More detail [here](#)