



Arts Council of Northern Ireland

Advocacy Guide: Making the case for the Arts

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Introduction

The Arts Council is the main advocate for the arts in Northern Ireland. It presents Government and other influential opinion formers with a strong case for supporting the arts, backed up by reliable research and evidence. It actively encourages public support by promoting the achievements of our artists and arts organisations in the media.

What the Arts Council achieves through its advocacy and communications channels is, however, only one of the elements necessary for successful advocacy.

As an artist, arts organisation or cultural agency, your work provides the most compelling case for the arts. In that sense, everything you do is advocacy. Your unique voice, insight and passion make you the best possible ambassadors for the arts. Engaging a politician or opinion former in an individual story or experience can make a strong and lasting impression.

Periodically the arts sector in Northern Ireland will join forces to lobby and campaign together on a single issue, with a set of agreed advocacy messages. Campaigning to influence the level of arts spending through the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) is one such example. At such times, the Arts Council provides the sector with a range of relevant advocacy messages.

Advocacy should, however, be a year-round activity. Cultivating strong relationships with key influencers, including the media, raises the profile of the arts and will pay longer-term dividends when you most need to have your voice heard.

This guide is intended to help you to advocate effectively on behalf of your work or organisation and on behalf of the arts in general.

Essential advocacy advice

- Be optimistic in your approach and aim to adapt your arguments to government policy rather than criticise it.
- Modify and target your messages to the individuals who you want to influence.
- Combine your advocacy with other arts organisations to add weight to your message.

Making the case: working with MLAs / MPs and other political stakeholders

All MLAs / MPs have influence that they can use in government. If you don't already have a strong relationship with your local MLAs / MPs, consider cultivating their support as soon as possible. Bear in mind that MLAs / MPs receive many appeals for support and have a limited amount of time, so aim to be concise.

It is important to know MLAs / MPs' interests. You can research their memberships of relevant committees at Stormont or at local government and find out if they have asked relevant questions.

It will strengthen your case if you can link your work to the stated priorities of Government. You can view the draft *Programme for Government Framework 2016-21* priorities [here](#).

In general, the priorities are:

- economy
- growth in jobs
- education
- health & wellbeing

The arts impact directly or indirectly on most of the Indicators and at least eight of the stated Outcomes of the current PfG; however the PfG specifically aligns the arts to **Indicator 27: Improve Cultural Participation**:

“Cultural engagement impacts positively on general wellbeing. Cultural participation is known to bring benefits in learning and education; and there is a significant association with cultural engagement and good health and satisfaction with life. Culture is key to our sense of identity as individuals and as communities. Cultural offerings encourage visitors and day-trips, creating and maintaining jobs in cultural tourism; and contribute to the development of creative industries in our economy.” (PfG).

Lead measure: % engaging with arts/cultural activities in the past year.

Indicator 27 is aligned to 5 strategic outcomes:

Outcome 5: We are an innovative, creative society, where people can fulfil their potential
(the PfG identifies Outcome 5 as being of particular relevance to the arts)

Outcome 9: We are a shared society that respects diversity

Outcome 10: We are a confident, welcoming, outward-looking society

Outcome 12: We have created a place where people want to live and work, to visit and invest

Outcome 14: We give our children and young people the best start in life

Other Key NI Executive documents include:

- [The Children and Young People Strategy \(Dec 2019\)](#)
- [Together: Building a United Community](#)
- [Protect Life 2 Strategy, for suicide prevention in Northern Ireland](#)

You can tailor your messages so that they are relevant to your organisation by considering such factors as:

- the number of people you employ
- the number of people attending your performances, exhibitions or workshops
- the secondary spend your organisation generates
- your connection to the creative industries
- your work with communities and young people
- your links to the economy, health and wellbeing, education, tourism, regeneration, and other agendas

In presenting your case to an MLA include the following:

- Stick to one issue per letter/email
- Explain clearly why you are writing and outline your concerns or your support
- Ensure you are factual and accurate
- Keep the letter to one side of an A4 page or two pages maximum
- Relate your points to the MLA's constituency
- Ask for a reply and/or an action from your MLA, eg. to meet with you, raise the issue in NI Assembly, attend an arts event or publicise the issue in local press.

How to contact your MLAs / MPs

Visit <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/your-mlas/> to find out who your local MLAs are. It is best to contact them via their constituency office and these are accessible on their respective party websites. Each constituency has 5 MLAs and it is advisable to contact them all. You can find a list of MPs at <https://members.parliament.uk/members/commons> and you can contact them via the party websites.

Events with MLAs / MPs

It may be appropriate to invite your local MLAs / MP to an event or to see the work of your organisation. Offer to provide an opportunity to meet some of your staff and some of the people who benefit from what you do. Draw up an itinerary, a map of your location, some background information about what you do, add your contact details and remember to make it clear if you want the MLA to say a few words. If your invitation is accepted, suggest that you set up a photo call with the local media.

Developing the relationship

- Follow up your contact with the key stakeholder and thank them for visiting your organisation.
- Continue to invite them to opening nights, launches, events.
- Provide regular updates on what your organisation is doing, for example through press releases and your social networking channels. Include your key advocacy messages in these updates.
- You may also encourage people who have benefited from your work to write to their MLAs / MP or other key stakeholders expressing support for the work that you do.

Over the long term this approach can help politicians and key stakeholders to see the value of the arts to their constituents and the local community.

Working with the media

Getting a relevant story into the media can help to communicate messages about arts funding to MLAs / MPs, local authorities and other stakeholders. A few key points should be considered when working with the media:

- Developing relationships with journalists can help to get your stories in the news. If a journalist knows you, and knows you can deliver good content, it makes their job much easier.
- Positioning leaders or artists from your organisation as spokespeople strengthens your message regionally and nationally. A good spokesperson helps to get your story into the news.

Regional radio stations often feature discussion shows on issues that affect local people. Volunteer your spokesperson to take part and highlight why the arts are of value in your community.

- An Arts Council [communications officer](#) may be able to provide you with an Arts Council endorsement quote for your news release.
- Working with other arts organisations could strengthen your message and make the story more newsworthy.
- Letters from audience members, friends and volunteers can keep your story in the news and show newspaper editors where readers' interests lie.
- A good photo or filming opportunity often helps to get coverage for your story. This might be an opportunity to invite your local MLAs / MP along.

Social networking

- Consider how to use your social networking channels as an active part of making the case for the arts. These can be powerful tools and can help you to engage in a dialogue and generate an immediate response from your followers.
- Think about how you can use Facebook and Twitter to bring to life key messages about why the arts matter. Give examples of how your organisation or work contributes to the economy or society. Using audience responses can help demonstrate the public value of your work.

E-newsletters

Consider how you can use your e-newsletters or e-marketing to make the case for the arts. Make sure that your local MLAs / MP, key local councillors, chairs of arts committees and other influencers you've identified are all on your newsletter mailing lists.

Good campaign practice

Key factors to ensure a campaign is a success include:

- Keep it simple: ensure that the campaign message is highly visible and encapsulated in a clear and simple statement
- Keep your message consistent across all channels
- Avoid multiple messages and themes
- Identify your target audience
- Ensure key messages are relevant and tailored to your target audience
- Provide reliable and quantifiable support evidence where possible
- Engage with the media
- Develop a media plan for broadcast, print and online media channels
- Utilise other partners' websites and social networks
- Seek out coalitions, collaborations and partnerships to pool expertise and resources and to multiply your campaign's impact
- Ensure there is common messaging across campaign partners.

Grant award logos

Acknowledging that public money funds the arts and serves a public purpose is important. Your work is the best advertisement that such funding is being put to good use – that it is an *investment*. This is why, as part of your ongoing advocacy work to raise public and political awareness of the many benefits of funding for the arts, you should always display the appropriate logos/acknowledgements on all of your promotional materials.

<http://artscouncil-ni.org/funding/logos-branding>

Useful facts about the Arts in Northern Ireland

Findings from the [Continuous Household Survey Northern Ireland 2019/20](#):

- 84% of adults engage in the arts
- 73% of adults with a disability engage in the arts
- 78% of adults living in the most deprived areas engage in the arts
- 85% of people living in rural areas engage in the arts (83% in urban areas)
- 94% of young people (aged 16-24) attend arts events

Principal benefits of engaging with arts, as cited by adults:

- Enjoyment
- Positive impact on health and wellbeing
- Improved knowledge
- Improved communication with family and friends
- Enabled new friendships

Findings from Arts Council of Northern Ireland [survey](#) of its 102 Annually Funded Organisations 2018-19:

- These organisations employ more than 7,500 workers; and 4,150 volunteers
- They generate income of £52.9 million (£24.9m through earned income, eg., box office)
- They deliver more than 69,000 arts events annually
- They attract more than 4.5 million attendees annually
- All ACNI-funded clients are fully engaged in Outreach programmes
- 63% of all activity is Outreach
- 46% of Outreach is delivered in NI's most deprived areas
- 21,000 arts activities are delivered annually in areas of highest deprivation
- 5,000 arts activities are delivered annually in schools
- [NI Creative Industries](#) support c.24,000 jobs and generate c.£1,012 million GVA to the local economy

Communications Contacts at the Arts Council

Please contact a member of the Communications Team for further advice on advocacy issues. Contact details are available in the [Contact Us](#) section of the Arts Council website.

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