Arts Council of Northern Ireland

ART FORM AND SPECIALIST AREA POLICY 2007-2012

COMMUNITY ARTS
Introduction

Community Arts is a process. It harnesses the transformative power of original artistic expression to produce a range of social, cultural and environmental outcomes. It aims to establish and maximise inclusive frameworks of working in political, social, cultural and economic community contexts. It provides opportunities for communities and their participants to develop their own skills as artists as well as for artists to explore ways of transferring those skills. Through its process, community arts maximises access, participation, authorship and ownership in collective arts practice.

There is a thriving community arts sector in Northern Ireland and its practice is at the cutting edge of community arts development internationally. Providers range from major organisations to small community-based groups at the grass roots. The range of settings is broad too, including arts centres, community centres, neighbourhood halls, prisons, youth centres and public spaces.

Community Arts is inclusive and democratic. It recognises the duality of the artist as enabler and the participant as artist in their own right. Participation in the process can often ignite a life-long engagement in the arts.

Northern Ireland society faces the challenge of creating a shared future based on respect, tolerance, peace and equality. Community Arts plays an important role in understanding the variety of our own identities, celebrating the multiculturalism that exists in Northern Ireland.

The corporate strategy of the Department of Culture Arts and Leisure ¹ emphasises equality of access to culture and arts, promotes creativity, innovation and lifelong learning and encourages respect for and the celebration of diversity. The Arts Council of Northern shares those goals and that vision. It seeks to contribute to the Shared Future agenda ² through this policy and by working in partnership with the sector and with key departments and agencies.

Community Arts transforms both individuals and communities. Recognising this, the Arts Council invested around £11 million in the sector over the period of its arts plan 2001-06. This ensured the stability of many strategically-important organisations and the development of major programmes right across Northern Ireland.

¹ Vision 04-07 (Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, March 2004)
² Policy and Strategic Framework for Good Relations in Northern Ireland (Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister [OFMDFM], March 2005)
Shrinking resources and ever-increasing demand will present major challenges and prompt difficult decisions over the next five years. But there will be opportunities for greater professional collaboration and co-operation. The Arts Council will support projects that work collaboratively, sharing resources and experience to build on the strong foundation of existing achievement.

The Council is committed to sustaining current excellence, while encouraging new growth and helping it to develop. Additionally, it will support the continuing evaluation of community arts work. The effectiveness of such work as a tool for social cohesion and collective and individual development must be demonstrated to promote the benefits and power of community arts to policy and decision makers.

**Funding Objectives**

- support and develop the community arts sector through partnerships with umbrella organisations;
- stabilise key community arts organisations through funding schemes;
- develop programmes which promote inter-cultural and cross-community tolerance and respect;
- support projects which promote high quality outputs as well as high quality processes;
- provide more opportunities for artists to work in a community context;
- encourage applications from organisations outside Belfast or Derry and particularly in rural areas;
- support community arts organisations to develop effective business plans and strategies for sustainability;
- encourage projects which demonstrate a sharing of resources and which promote best value practices within the sector.
Additional Information

‘Creative Connections’ Five Year Arts Strategy, 2007-2012
www.artscouncil-ni.org/subpages/strategy.htm

Corporate Plan, 2007-2010
www.artscouncil-ni.org/subpages/strategy.htm

Art Form and Specialist Area Policies, 2007-2012
www.artscouncil-ni.org/subpages/aboutthearts.htm

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For further information please contact:

Arts Council of Northern Ireland,
MacNeice House, 77 Malone Road, Belfast BT9 6AQ.
T. 028 9038 5200  F. 028 9066 1715
E. info@artscouncil-ni.org
W. www.artscouncil-ni.org

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