

THE COURTHOUSE ARTS CENTRE

STRATEGIC PLAN

23 | 25



An exhibition of artwork by
Selma McCormack at the Courthouse

INTRODUCTION



The Courthouse Arts Centre is part of the fabric and fibre of Tinahely's community, and those of the surrounding rural area. When you talk to people about the Courthouse Arts Centre, you'll repeatedly hear words like "valuable", "accessible", "vital", and "asset" – and with good reason. The close links that have been maintained and built upon throughout the community are our greatest asset and our greatest strength.

With diligent attention to bringing variety, and constant striving to offer something new, the Courthouse Arts Centre has a reputation, both locally and from wider afield, for delivering something for everyone. Our outreach work is a source of great pride to us and is vital in offering opportunities for the disadvantaged and disenfranchised from the arts to become the regulars, the friends, and the artists of tomorrow.

When this plan was in its inception, it was to these communities we turned. We listened to our audiences, we spoke to people, and we engaged with artists. We kept them all at the heart of what we were trying to achieve through this plan. And then we allowed ourselves to dream. This plan is the result of the listening, the engagement, and the dreaming. We look forward, now, to turning this plan into a reality in the years ahead, and to the welcoming of friends, new and old, to enjoy an ever-increasing variety of experiences at the Courthouse Arts Centre.

Artistic Director & Board of Directors
The Courthouse Arts Centre



Jack O' Rourke and Alice Lynskey performing at the Courthouse

70 Roland



A BIT ABOUT US



Housed within a beautifully restored historic Courthouse building, the Courthouse Arts Centre is located in the picturesque village of Tinahely in rural South Wicklow. Originally built in 1843 by Thomas Symes, the building is described by the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage as *“representing an important component of the mid nineteenth-century built heritage of Tinahely”*. In its current form, the Courthouse Arts Centre holds significant historical, architectural and social value and remains a major landmark and treasured local community asset, occupying pride of place in Tinahely's historic Market Square.

In addition to its function as a courthouse, throughout the years, the building has also catered for a wide variety of arts and community activities such as dances, film screenings as well as other social and cultural events. The Courthouse gradually fell into disrepair during the 1980s, but was eventually given a new lease of life after a local committee secured funding for the ambitious restoration. The Courthouse Arts Centre subsequently reopened to the public in January 1996 as a centre for the arts, culture and heritage. Recognised as Wicklow's longest established arts venue, the Courthouse continues to play a vital role within the local community in Tinahely as well as being an integral part of Wicklow's cultural infrastructure.

Over the past 26 years, the organisation has weathered many storms but has been steadfast in providing a high-quality, inclusive cultural offering to a broad audience base. The Courthouse's unique geographic position draws audiences from Wicklow, Wexford and Carlow as well as from further afield. Access, inclusion and engagement are vital components of our ethos and we strive to create and facilitate meaningful connections between artists, audiences and within the wider community around us.

The Courthouse is run by a small but dedicated team of administrative staff and volunteers, and the organisation is governed by our Board of Directors. As a collective group, we are honoured to act as custodians of this magnificent cultural venue, and we take enormous pride in being able to provide a much-needed social and cultural facility within a disadvantaged area. We also see the Courthouse as a place for artistic experimentation and creative research as well as for the development and presentation of new, innovative and engaging art, some of which may not otherwise have been accessible to the community we serve.

In an audience survey conducted in March 2022, 94% of our respondents said they strongly believe that the Courthouse is a valuable asset to the local community, and the variety of responses showed evidence of a diverse range of deeply personal connections to the venue. This cemented our view that the Courthouse remains a community asset of significant value, a cherished cultural centre and an essential local space for social interaction.

Serving as an important link to the wider cultural sector in Ireland, the Courthouse brings a variety of high-quality music, theatre, film, literature, comedy and visual art to members of our community who may be unable to access these events in larger cities. We also nurture and grow youth, amateur and community art by providing accessible and affordable space for workshops, rehearsals and performances as well as through our participation in events such as Culture Night and Cruinniú na nÓg.

Our artistic policy is informed by the strategies of The Arts Council of Ireland, Wicklow County Arts Office and Creative Ireland, as well as being informed by the interests and needs of our community. This Strategic Plan for 2023–2025 is also informed by our artistic policy, and the priorities outlined in this document are an extension of that policy. Now, as we prepare to implement this new strategy, we are excited to begin a new chapter in the long history of the Courthouse Arts Centre. This is an ambitious but achievable strategy, and we are confident in our ability, knowledge and experience to deliver on our aims and to realise our vision.



V ISION

Our **VISION** is for the Courthouse Arts Centre to be widely recognised as an inclusive, accessible and inspirational place where artists, audiences and communities are given the opportunity to connect within an intimate, welcoming and supportive environment.



M ISSION

Our **MISSION** is to ensure that the Courthouse Arts Centre reaches its optimum potential as a valued cultural and community resource, as well as ensuring that it can continue to operate sustainably at this level.

V ALUES

A decorative graphic consisting of three horizontal lines: a thin grey line at the top, a medium grey line in the middle, and a thick orange line at the bottom. On the right side, there is a large orange circular element that is partially cut off by the edge of the page.

- **Working Together:** As a small organisation with limited resources, we place enormous value on the power and potential of working together through mutually beneficial partnerships. We collaborate generously with a diverse range of organisations, groups and individuals, and we proactively seek out new partnerships with the potential to create synergy and new ideas.
- **The Power of Community:** As both a cultural and community facility, we firmly believe in the value and power of community, as well as recognising the vital role that culture plays within the fabric of all communities. We aim to connect people and communities through cultural activities, enhancing quality of life, and helping to integrate people and communities.
- **Welcoming:** We pride ourselves on being accessible and inclusive. We are open, welcoming and supportive to everyone who wishes to engage with us. We are proactive in our approach to being inclusive, and we aim to be accessible in every sense of the word.
- **Striving for Excellence:** We strive for excellence in everything we do, and we encourage and support our collaborators to do the same. From our artistic programme and community engagement events, to our leadership, administration and governance, we strive for excellence across all aspects of day-to-day and long-term strategic activity. We are open, honest and transparent and we expect a similar approach from our partners.

PRIORITY 1:

OUR ORGANISATION



Our priority is to build a resilient, forward-thinking, transparent, sustainable and inclusive organisation which is supported by strong foundations and which will allow us to work towards our vision.

1.1 GOVERNANCE

AIM: To stabilise the organisation by re-building its fundamental governance structure, bringing in new expertise, and ensuring policies and procedures are fit-for-purpose.

OUTCOME: As an organisation, The Courthouse has the necessary skills, attitudes, commitment and confidence in its governance structure. Our Board is diverse and inclusive, our governance processes are transparent and they align with best practice.

What **ACTIONS** will we take?

- We will recruit a number of new, passionate, skilled and experienced board members through an open public call for members.
- Prior to recruitment, we will conduct a skills audit of current board members, and recruit new board members based on specific desirable skillsets.
- We will review our governance documentation, policies and procedures. We will ensure that new members have an in-depth understanding of what is required of them as board members.
- We will invest in governance training for our board members and senior staff. We will ensure our governance policies and practices are aligned with best practice, as defined by the Charities Governance Code.

What will our **JOURNEY** look like?

Year 1: 2023

A detailed skills audit will have been completed. 3 new members will have been elected to the Board of Directors. We will have reviewed our current governance documentation internally and brought all policies and procedures up-to-date.

Year 2: 2024

By the end of 2024, 2 new Board members will have been elected. We will have provided charity governance training to Board Members and Senior Staff.

Year 3: 2025

Our Board of Directors will have reached its maximum of 10 members. Our policies, practices, procedures and documentation in relation to governance will be fully aligned with best practice.

1.2 FINANCIAL STABILITY

AIM: To become more financially resilient by diversifying our revenue streams, increasing our self-generated income and securing additional public funding from multiple sources.

OUTCOME: Financially, the Courthouse will become more self-sufficient and sustainable, and it will reduce its dependency on the CE Scheme for staffing. The Courthouse will thrive as it becomes more financially independent.

What **ACTIONS** will we take?

- We will aim to increase ticket sales income through the programming of mainstream and popular events. Aligned with our artistic policy, we will ensure an appropriate programmatic balance is maintained. We will continue to work with partners such as Music Network in relation to programming.
- We will diversify our revenue streams and maximise income from all sources, with a specific emphasis on venue hire. Our kitchen facilities, office space, green room, main hall and Market Square building all provide valuable income generating opportunities, and we will ensure these spaces are utilised.
- Leveraging our geographic position, we will proactively expand our network of supporters and donors across Wicklow, Wexford and Carlow. We will encourage supporters to make charitable donations to the Courthouse through a new donations campaign. Using this network, we will approach individuals who may have the potential to help us secure corporate sponsorship or to build new, potentially beneficial relationships.
- We will aim to increase the levels of core public funding which we receive from the Arts Council and Wicklow County Arts Office by applying to new funding strands, applying for partnership-based grants (including artist in residence funding) and participating in funded national programmes such as Culture Night, Cruinniú na nÓg and Wicklow's Creative Ireland Programme (2023–2027), where possible.

What will our **JOURNEY** look like?

Year 1: 2023

We will have increased our net income from ticket sales by at least 10%, and our attendances will have grown by 10%. Compared with 2022, income from venue hire will have increased by 20% and we will have received over €2,000 in donations.

Year 2: 2024

Income from ticket sales will continue to grow, with a total increase of 15% compared to 2022. Revenue from venue hires will also continue to grow and total donations will at least match those of 2023.

Year 3: 2025

Compared with 2022, our net income from ticket sales will have increased by a total of 20% and donations will have totalled €5,000. We will have secured one substantial corporate sponsor. Our total public funding will have increased by 20% compared with 2022.

1.3 STAFFING & OPERATIONS

AIM: To build a committed, motivated, organised and skilled workforce, and to systematise our operational processes in order to ensure the smooth and efficient operation of the Courthouse across all of its activities.

OUTCOME: With a more systematic approach and clear procedures for staff and volunteers, the day-to-day operations of the Courthouse will become more stable, enabling the organisation to build from a more secure operational position.

What **ACTIONS** will we take?

- We will continue to utilise the Community Employment (CE) Scheme to fill vacant positions. We will provide appropriate training to new CE Scheme employees, ensuring they are supported and encouraged to develop their skills. By increasing our financial stability, we will gradually reduce our dependency on the CE Scheme, enabling us to recruit more freely and effectively for highly skilled positions.
- We will develop a comprehensive staff handbook outlining all day-to-day operations in a clear, user-friendly way. Leading by example, we will continue to support all staff to develop their skills, encouraging and motivating them to be the best that they can be. In 2025, we will introduce a new volunteer programme aimed at increasing our operational capacity while also growing our community.
- Our Board of Directors will take a proactive role in supporting key staff members with the day-to-day operations of the venue until such time as sufficient resources are available to ensure smooth running of all operational aspects. The Board of Directors will support the new Artistic Director in a proactive, practical and “hands-on” way, while also providing oversight on a strategic level.

What will our **JOURNEY** look like?

Year 1: 2023

Our vacant positions will be filled by suitable new staff members. The new staff handbook will be distributed and staff training will be delivered for new and existing employees.

Year 2: 2024

The influence and expertise of the Board of Directors will be strongly felt as the organisation hits its stride. Regular staff meetings, feedback and training will help to ensure constant growth, learning and development.

Year 3: 2025

Our new volunteer programme will commence. The Board of Directors will gradually step back from day-to-day operations. Our reliance on the CE Scheme will be reduced, and by the end of 2025 we will be in a position to recruit for one full-time position outside of the CE Scheme.

PRIORITY 2: ARTISTS & CREATIVE INCUBATION



Our priority is to support and showcase artists and their work, by offering an inspirational and supportive incubation space for experimentation and creation, as well as opportunities to connect with a diverse audience.

2.1 BUILDING & FACILITIES

AIM: To improve and upgrade our building and its facilities for the benefit of artists and creative practitioners, and to utilise our available spaces to their maximum sustainable potential.

OUTCOME: Our physical space is used to its full potential, and our reputation as a space for creative incubation grows. The number and calibre of Irish and international artists who want to use the space continues to increase and diversify.

What **ACTIONS** will we take?

- Through a collaborative approach, and with input from local artists and other stakeholders, we will reimagine and repurpose the underutilised indoor spaces at the Courthouse and Market Square buildings, including our office spaces, kitchen space, green room and exhibition spaces. We will focus on developing multi-purpose usage models in order to accommodate a broad range of artists and creative activities.
- Following an internal audit of our available spaces, and the collaborative ideation around its potential usage, we will source funding for the repurposing and refurbishment of those spaces. In the short-term, we will “spring clean” these spaces and freshen them up, providing welcoming and comfortable multi-purpose spaces.
- We will source funding for an upgrade to our current sound system in the main Courthouse performance space. We will continue to invest in sound, lighting and other production equipment to ensure that a broad range of artists and performing groups are excited about presenting their work at the Courthouse.

What will our **JOURNEY** look like?

Year 1: 2023

Our internal audit will be completed, with initial plans for refurbishment in process. A short-term “spring clean” will be completed. Fundraising will begin for refurbishment and for the purchase of a new sound system.

Year 2: 2024

With funding secured, our in-house sound system will be successfully upgraded. Fundraising and planning will continue for the repurposing of our other spaces, with donations being secured and applications for grant funding being submitted.

Year 3: 2025

Upgrades and refurbishment to our office spaces, kitchen space, green room and exhibition spaces will be completed. Reimagined multi-purpose spaces will be revealed and used regularly by artists and community groups.

2.2 ARTIST INCUBATION & CREATIVE CONNECTIONS

AIM: To establish a regular Artist-in-Residence Scheme at the Courthouse, bringing high calibre artists across all genres and artforms to experiment, create and to share their work with audiences and our community.

OUTCOME: An increasing number of artists and creative practitioners are now working from the Courthouse, developing new work and honing their skills. Their creative energy flows throughout the building and out into the streets as they give back to the community, connecting with local residents in a natural and meaningful way.

What **ACTIONS** will we take?

- We will source and secure funding for the development of a new Artist-in-Residence Scheme. Prior to applying for funding, we will develop the structure, criteria and parameters of the scheme in collaboration with a group of artists and other relevant stakeholders. We will also collaborate with other local providers to secure and offer suitable accommodation and other essential supports.
- With support from local and national funding bodies, as well as individual donors, we will provide fully funded Artist-in-Residence opportunities to local, national and international artists across all artforms and genres. Through an open call for applicants, we will offer at least 3 fixed-term Artist-in-Residence opportunities on an annual basis with integrated public performance/exhibition opportunities.
- Throughout the timeframe of each Artist-in-Residence Scheme, we will provide meaningful opportunities for them to connect with the local community through a variety of initiatives including school workshops, “breaking bread” events, masterclasses, mentoring sessions, local festivals, cultural events and other opportunities in the locality.
- As part of each residency programme, at least one major public performance/exhibition will be organised at the Courthouse. This would be integrated with our regular programme of events and promoted as widely as possible, through the combined networks and contacts of the Courthouse, the community and the artist. These events could also be linked with initiatives such as Culture Night.

What will our **JOURNEY** look like?

Year 1: 2023

The structure and framework of the new Artist-in-Residence Scheme will be completed. Grant applications will be submitted specifically for the Artist-in-Residence Scheme with additional funding being sought from other sources.

Year 2: 2024

The first Artist-in-Residence Scheme will be completed, encompassing the funding, open call, incubation, presentation and evaluation processes. Learnings will help to inform subsequent schemes, and a callout for 2025 will be made.

Year 3: 2025

A total of three full-term artist residencies will be successfully completed, with increases in funding to support its expansion. The number of artists applying for residencies will have increased by 20% since the first callout.



a product of The Coca-Cola Company

An arts and crafts workshop at the Courthouse

PRIORITY 3: AUDIENCES & OUR COMMUNITY



Our priority is to provide our audiences and our community with inspirational cultural experiences, within an inclusive, welcoming and accessible space, and to increase the number and diversity of people who benefit from the Courthouse and its activities.

3.1 VISITOR SPACES & COMMUNICATION

AIM: To create a warm and welcoming environment for audiences and visitors by enhancing our physical and digital spaces, and by reviewing and improving our communications across all channels and platforms.

OUTCOME: Audiences and visitors to the Courthouse will enjoy an enhanced visitor experience across the entire customer journey, leading to increased audience attendance and a wider audience base.

What **ACTIONS** will we take?

- Similar to the reimagining of our underutilised spaces, we will also collaboratively reimagine our public-facing indoor, outdoor and digital spaces, including our front garden, outdoor signage and the general aesthetic of the building as well as our website and social media platforms. A “spring-clean” operation will swiftly enhance the aesthetic and feel of these spaces in the short-term, while longer term plans are made.
- Across all channels, platforms and spaces (digital and physical), we will ensure that visitor information is accurate, up to date, clearly articulated and effectively communicated. We will be responsive to customer enquiries, requests and comments and we will gather regular feedback through a post-show digital survey. We will also review and update how the Courthouse is represented on third-party websites.
- We will continue to upgrade the physical public-facing facilities at the Courthouse including our bar area, toilets, foyer and seating in order to maintain a high standard of visitor experience and comfort.
- We will secure funding and engage a branding consultant/web developer to review and update our website alongside a suite of branding guidelines and templates. This will ensure that our branding is fresh, contemporary and consistent. Focusing on the customer journey experience, we will launch a new website in 2025 and utilise new tools such as QR codes to engage audiences.

What will our **JOURNEY** look like?

Year 1: 2023

A short-term “spring clean” of public-facing spaces will be completed. Longer-term refurbishment plans will be made, and the fundraising process will begin.

Year 2: 2024

Based on regular feedback gathered through a post-show digital survey, we will continue to improve and enhance the overall visitor experience at the Courthouse within our available resources.

Year 3: 2025

Our new website will be designed, created and launched alongside a new, fresh brand image for the Courthouse. Website traffic will increase, and our profile will continue to grow, both locally and nationally.

3.2 PROGRAMMING, AUDIENCES & MARKETING

AIM: To grow audience attendance through increased mainstream programming, a deeper understanding of audience motivations, and through the use of targeted marketing tactics linked to programming.

OUTCOME: Audience attendances will increase significantly, leading to a greater sense of pride around the venue, more financial stability, enhanced enthusiasm and motivation internally, and a growing reputation and presence in Co. Wicklow.

What **ACTIONS** will we take?

- In line with our Artistic Policy, we will grow our programming and continue to increase the amount of mainstream/popular programming. This will focus particularly on music, comedy, film and family shows which have the potential to bring in larger audience numbers. Through targeted marketing campaigns, we will aim to convert new bookers into regular bookers by building on the positive visitor experience.
- Using the findings from our recent audience survey, combined with box office data and anecdotal evidence, we will conduct a data audit to assess the quality of audience data available. On an ongoing basis, we will continue to supplement this data using primary and secondary sources, providing an in-depth overview of our current and potential audiences.
- Utilising the audience data and communication channels available, we will adopt target marketing tactics to directly engage with audiences in a more efficient and cost-effective way. Using tools such as email newsletters, mail drops, exit flyering, social media and other approaches, we will communicate directly with audiences on their terms and in relation to events which may be of particular interest to them. We will also reassess the suitability of our current ticketing provider, based on its audience data and targeted marketing capability versus cost.
- We will utilise, contribute towards and grow our networks and relationships with other cultural institutions in Wicklow and further afield as well as with other local organisations, community groups, schools, and businesses as a way of increasing our presence in the county.

What will our **JOURNEY** look like?

Year 1: 2023

Compared with 2022, our total audience attendance will increase by at least 10%. Our audience data audit will be complete. We will continue to learn about our audiences and begin to use more targeted marketing.

Year 2: 2024

Audience attendance will increase by more than 20% compared with 2022. Our targeted marketing will show its effectiveness, with more sell-out shows across various artforms. Our profile will also grow, leading to greater word-of-mouth marketing.

Year 3: 2025

Over the past 3 years, audience figures will have grown by at least 25% compared with 2022. We will have a greater understanding of our audiences and how to communicate effectively with them. Our networks will grow, bringing new opportunities and an increased sense of pride in the Courthouse.

3.3 OUTREACH & ENGAGEMENT

AIM: To ensure that the Courthouse remains a valued cultural and community asset for Tinahely and the surrounding area, through accessible, creative and interactive outreach and engagement activities.

OUTCOME: The Courthouse is recognised as an invaluable community asset, which is accessible, welcoming, proactively inclusive and integrated within the local community.

What **ACTIONS** will we take?

- Through our Artist-in-Residence Scheme, we will create and facilitate meaningful opportunities for creative connections with local community groups, schools, youth groups and other organisations in the surrounding areas. These longer term relationships will help to build new audiences, while also enabling visiting artists to connect with local groups and reach new audiences.
- We will continue to provide affordable, comfortable and suitable spaces for local community groups to host regular meetings, workshops and other activities. Acknowledging the changing demographic in Tinahely, we will proactively reach out to migrant and refugee communities, as well as other marginalised groups in our locality, providing a safe haven and a place to connect with local groups and support networks.
- Across all artforms and genres, we will encourage, support and facilitate the provision of community and youth-focused engagement activities, workshops, participative opportunities and other supplementary events. These could include bespoke schools workshops, artist talks, open rehearsals and other similar events.
- We will engage proactively with primary and secondary schools in the local area, offering targeted ticketing initiatives to engage younger audiences and school groups. As a community space, we will offer accessible and affordable space for school shows, workshops and other events. Working collaboratively, we will continue to participate in national cultural initiatives such as Culture Night and Cruinniú na nÓg, as well as facilitating and contributing towards collaborative outreach and educational projects with a range of arts organisations, festivals and artists.

What will our **JOURNEY** look like?

Year 1: 2023

Having developed new relationships with local primary and secondary schools, we will facilitate at least 3 bespoke schools events. Engagement with Culture Night and Cruinniú na nÓg will increase by 10% compared with 2022.

Year 2: 2024

As part of our Artist-in-Residence Scheme, a new community engagement project will be delivered, reaching over 500 people. We will accommodate 2 additional weekly community groups and facilitate 2 bespoke engagement projects.

Year 3: 2025

Our Culture Night and Cruinniú na nÓg programmes will expand, engaging over 500 people in 2025. We will accommodate a further 2 community groups. We will deliver 2 major community projects as part of our Artist-in-Residence Scheme, collectively reaching over 1,000 people since 2023.



Mark Caprice performs as part of Culture Night 2022



This Strategic Plan has been developed in consultation with Arts Leaders Associates Ltd.



With continued thanks to our sponsors, patrons, supporters and friends.