

LAOIS FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT

2018 – 2025

An agreement between Laois County Council and the Arts Council based on

A FRAMEWORK FOR COLLABORATION

an agreement between The Arts Council and County and City Management Association



Context / Background

This is an agreement reached by the Arts Council and Laois County Council. Its purpose is to highlight the shared strategic priorities for arts development in Laois over the period of this agreement; setting out a vision and goals for what we wish to achieve together.

It has been developed through a collaborative process between both organisations, under the overarching national agreement, A Framework for Collaboration (2016 – 2025) between the Arts Council and the County and City Management Association.

This national agreement reaffirms the centrality of a strategic partnership which has been in existence since 1985 and outlines a shared vision for a new era of arts development, striving for equality of access to and engagement in the arts by all those living in Ireland.

As part of this agreement we commit to developing a methodology for measuring the social impact of our shared investment.

Parties to Agreement

The Arts Council / An Comhairle Ealaíon is the national government agency charged with developing and promoting the arts in Ireland. It works in partnership with artists, arts organisations, public policy makers and others to build a central place for the arts in Irish life.

Laois County Council / Comhairle Chontae Laois is responsible for the administrative area of County Laois, delivering a wide range of services necessary to the physical, economic, social and cultural life of the county. In accordance with local government legislation, which encompasses both democratic representation and public administration, Laois County Council as a local authority performs both a representational and operational role.

The County and City Management Association is the representative voice of the local government management network. It is a non-statutory body that works to ensure that the influence of local authority Chief Executives is brought to bear on the development and implementation of relevant policy.

Statement of Common Purpose

The Arts Council / An Comhairle Ealaíon and Laois County Council are committed to working together in partnership to promote and develop the arts in Laois in an integrated manner. We believe that by working closely together we can strengthen the arts, improve public participation in the arts, and enhance the sustainability of those working in the arts.

We recognise the autonomy of the parties to this agreement and our distinctive roles as defined in legislation and developed in strategy.

The Arts Council is the national agency for developing, promoting and funding the arts in Ireland. The Council's core functions under the Arts Act 2003 are to stimulate public interest in the arts; to promote knowledge, appreciation and practice of the arts; to assist in improving standards in the arts; and, to advise the Minister and other public bodies on the arts. The Arts Council has two policy priorities: the Artist and Public Engagement. Its investment and other actions to support the arts are guided by two primary goals: (i) that artists are supported to make excellent work which is enjoyed and valued and (ii) that more people will enjoy high quality arts experiences.

Laois County Council is the elected and administrative body with the closest relationship with people and place in Laois. It is responsible for the development of the county as a vibrant place in which people can live, work, visit and invest. The arts have had demonstrable impact across key pillars of local development; culture, community and the economy; Laois County Council's investment in the arts is primarily based on its intrinsic value and is underpinned by the inherent potential of the arts to contribute to these three areas of development.

Goals of this Agreement

- To achieve a close and effective working relationship between the Arts Council and Laois County Council
- To provide an overarching framework of values, principles and strategic priorities that will guide and inform the creation of shared strategic actions.
- To demonstrably increase the levels of public engagement in the arts throughout the county
- To improve opportunities and supports for artists and those working in the arts
- To optimise our shared investment in the arts and ensure we are applying resources in the most equitable and efficient way possible.
- To measure the social impact of our shared investment as a means of understanding, learning and empowering further development.
- To effectively integrate the key principles of this agreement into relevant future planning and development strategies of the Arts Council and Laois County Council.

Principles

A shared set of principles will underpin and inform our collaboration at all times. These include a commitment to ensuring:

- Access to and engagement with the arts for all people and a determination to ensure that the return on public investment in the arts benefits as many as possible.
- Value for the work of artists, which illuminates the present, nourishes our understandings of the past and inspires our visions of the future.
- Diversity of contexts and types of participation that constitute public engagement, most particularly social and cultural diversity.
- Quality of provision – defined appropriately according to context – so that the best possible artistic outcomes are secured within the wider contexts of cultural value and the public good.

A profile of the Arts in Laois

Laois is a county of quiet natural beauty. It has a wide diversity of scenery ranging from the Slieve Bloom Mountains to the rich farmland that covers much of the county. There are extensive forests in the county and within a mile of several of the main roads there are bogs and tracts of peat that are beautiful and peaceful. Various scenic routes and beauty spots include the Windy Gap near Stradbally and the nature walks in the Slieve Blooms, Durrow and Abbeyleix. Its built heritage includes the majestic ruins at the Rock of Dunamaise, the first plantation fort in the English speaking world at Portlaoise, numerous monastic remains and magnificent houses including Emo Court, Ballyfin Demense, Abbeyleix House and Stradbally Hall.

Laois is a rural county which has a steadily intensifying urban density. In 2002 the population of Laois was 58,722 and in 2016 it grew to 84,732 as per census data. Laois has the second highest rate of population growth in the State (28%) since 2011, 2.5 times the National average of 8.1%. The population in Laois from 2002 to 2016 shows a 44% increase in 15 years.

The reason for much of this growth can be attributed to the availability of good quality affordable housing with excellent commuter connectivity to centres of employment in north Kildare and Dublin.

Despite facilitating the population growth within the county, the Local Authority has preserved the rural characteristics of the county particularly where there has been urbanisation in the north and east of the county. Further significant growth is anticipated.

Laois somewhat bucks the national trend with a marked young population as can be seen from the table below.

% of the population between 0-24

<i>Age Range</i>	<i>Population</i>
<i>0-14</i>	20,812
<i>15-24</i>	9,435
<i>0-24</i>	30,247
<i>Total Population</i>	84,697
<i>Total % of Population Under 25</i>	35.7%
<i>National % of Population Under 25</i>	33.2%

Against this backdrop, Laois County Council has been to the forefront of local arts development being one of the first local authorities to appoint an Arts Officer in 1989. Almost three decades later, Laois has developed cultural initiatives which have had a lasting impact.

The arts and library infrastructure has developed to a high standard, which includes the Dunamais Arts Centre (est. 1999) and the Laois Arthouse (est. 2011). The Dunamais Arts Centre is a multi-disciplinary venue and the primary performance space in the county; it also has workshops spaces, digital cinema facilities and an exhibition space. The Laois Arthouse offers artists' studios and living accommodation, a gallery, a kiln, a garden space and opportunities for artists. It runs a high profile public engagement programme of artists' residences which both impact nationally and resonate in the community, such as 'Sitting', a portraiture project with Nick Miller and 'Townscape' by Mary Burke, which is touring nationally.

The Arts Office provides information, advice and assistance to a wide range of clients, and develops policies in relation to the arts. Four arts plans have been adopted, as well as its Creative Ireland Strategy and the fifth arts plan is underway. The Arts Office also manages and delivers a number of key cultural initiatives, such as the annual Leaves Literary Festival, Bealtaine Festival, Culture Night, a Summer Arts Programme as well as coordinating two chapters of the Laois Youth Theatre, and others in Mountrath and Portarlinton. Other developments include public art, artists in schools programme, grants, bursary schemes and the Creative Ireland Laois programme.

Laois County Council has been to the fore in music development establishing the Laois School of Music in 2001; ten years later, the successful bid for Music Generation Laois

followed. Today the number of children and young people receiving weekly music tuition in the county is 3,500. Music development in the county, led by Laois County Council, (in partnership with the ETB, the Arts Council and Music Generation National Office) has been a significant and positive great news story.

During this Framework Agreement it will be necessary to reflect on how best to sustain these significant programmes while ensuring the Arts Office has scope and capacity to strategically build new partnerships and introduce new elements of arts development as required.

Laois is firmly rooted in the Midlands and *The Midlands Arts and Culture Magazine*, a partnership project between the four midland local authority arts offices profiles the rich diversity of practice and quality of art making taking place across the region. There is an overall intention to build on its success with other projects that would be of mutual benefit to the artists and audiences that the Midland region serves.

Laois is the only county in Ireland that is completely surrounded by counties which don't touch the sea. One could be forgiven for imagining that this might present a picture of insularity and boundary-enforced remoteness; however Laois is a county open to creativity and is a place of boundless connectedness which we illustrate through the arts.

STRATEGIC ACTIONS

1. Music Development

A strong and vibrant feature of the arts in Laois is its commitment by the local authority to music education and the commissioning of new music.

The Laois School of Music (est. 2001) is an award winning, locally sustained music education programme, which along with weekly tuition over a wide range of instruments, offers an orchestral programme and performing opportunities on a national and international basis. Music Generation Laois, part of Ireland's National Music Education Programme, offers a complimentary performance music education programme in schools and community settings, specialising in harp and pipes and the development of young ensembles, with several performance opportunities at home and abroad.

Musicians and composers from Laois and beyond have been supported to work in a local context alongside students of both LSM and MGL. Commissioning and premiering new works is valuable not only to composers but to students and tutors who gain real insight

into the life of a professional musician, along with a personal sense of achievement in collaborating and performing.

A recent example is the *New Works Series 2016*, commissioned by Music Generation Laois, which engaged three professional musicians to work with LSM Youth Orchestra, MGL Harp Ensemble and MGL Trad Orchestra. Such collaborations have lasting positive effects on the music service.

Laois School of Music was incorporated as a Limited Company in 2010, whilst remaining under the auspices of Laois Arts Office. On a weekly basis it has 650 young musicians availing of music tuition in its current home in Tower Hill. Having always depended on the goodwill of schools to house the facility it has outgrown annual tenancy arrangements and needs an independent building to accommodate the increased demand and allow for growth. The Arts Council have supported The Laois School of Music for many years and it is this development which forms a particular focus of this agreement.

The music service in Laois has grown exponentially in the past ten years, especially since the introduction of Music Generation Laois. This growth has been very welcome and affirming for all involved but the resources to sustain the administration of such growth have not increased comparatively.

Over the course of the agreement we share the following desired outcomes to our shared investment in these programme areas.

- That the model of provision for the Laois School of Music is explored for succession planning to ensure the legacy and longevity of the investment to date.
- That we track the education, career pathways and professional development of students from the Laois School of Music to measure the social impact of our investment into music education for young people.
- That we explore the feasibility and establishment of third level music education in the county, establishing Laois as a centre of excellence for music education in the Midlands.
- We will have inspired excellence in our music education by adding to the repertoire of new Irish music; regularly commissioning new work and always working with professional musicians who will inspire our young ensembles.

2. Young people, children and education

In the 2016 census, Laois was revealed to have one of the largest growths in secondary school going population at 17.6%. This follows Fingal (20.1%) and Meath (18.1%). It is therefore evident that our provision for young people needs to expand with the population growth in order to create wider accessibility.

Publically funded youth arts provision in Laois is through the Laois Youth Theatre, Artists in Schools and Summer Arts Programme. Other high quality arts provision is available for young people through the independently run Laois Youth Dance Ensemble. The Laois School of Music and Music Generation Laois, both of whom richly add to the landscape of youth arts provision are addressed separately in the action on Music Development.

Youth Theatre is provided in three locations in the county to different age groups. We have notice a marked demand for the arts service provided to school going population and there is potential to grow and develop this.

The Artist in Schools Scheme has been developed incrementally since 1993 and currently 9 schools avail of the scheme annually.

The Arts Office runs the annual Summer Arts Programme across the county providing a valuable opportunity for young people to engage with artists and arts practice in community settings.

Research will be undertaken through measuring the impact these programme, their organisational capacity and potential for development.

We share the following desired outcomes to our joint investment in these programme areas:

- The enhanced capacity and professional development of youth arts providers to deliver these programmes.
- An active listening to the voice of the young person in shaping and developing youth arts provision.
- Through research and feasibility explore if any of these programmes can be delivered by another organisation.
- A greater number of youth groups and local organisations, particularly those keen to expand and explore their arts provision will be supported to develop new participation in the arts for their young members.

- A greater number of young people will be engaged in the arts across all age groups and all artforms on a regular basis and evidence of the impact of their long term engagement in the arts.
- We will engage a number of measures to determine the social and cultural impact of this investment.

3. Creative Communities

We value the role of the arts across a broad spectrum of community contexts, such as in health, disability, communities of place or interest, older people and cultural diversity. There are pockets in Laois where we can identify communities for whom access to the arts is difficult, for many reasons such as geographic isolation, demographic or socio economic reasons. 11,500 people leave the county daily to commute to work, creating a large cohort whose cultural needs should be thought about differently.

Laois County Council are currently conducting a new socio economic study on the county, with a detailed look at the urban centres which will be used as a source of evidence and awareness raising on public engagement needs.

There are examples of good practice between artists and communities to build upon and we value the opportunity to advance a wider engagement with the arts countywide. There is also a need to work with more groups within the community to broaden their perspective of how the arts can have a role in their lives.

We recognise the value of highly skilled artists in the county for whom collaborative practice is core to their work and to opening up further opportunities for other artists to engage with community context.

We recognise this is a new area of development, which requires time and resources to implement.

Over the course of this agreement we share the desired outcomes that:

- Through research we will have identified the best approach to build public engagement in the arts in Laois, with a particular focus on communities for whom access to the arts is difficult.
- We will have aligned with national best practice research, policy and models for equality and diversity

- We will have developed the range and nature of supports provided to artists and communities to work collaboratively such as continued professional development for artists.
- More community groups will have been provided with opportunities to engage in arts projects and programmes, introduced to artists with relevant arts practice, and guided in how to develop their own projects and collaborate successfully with artists.
- We will design a number of measures to determine the impact of this investment.

4. Capacity Building

In line with the needs identified earlier, we will examine a range of measures to address capacity-building and professional development in the arts sector. The arts programme has grown considerably in the last number of years and capacity has been reached within current resources to enable any further growth. The Laois Arthouse, the Laois School of Music LTD, the Leaves Festival of Writing and Music and other major programmes are all run directly by the Arts Office.

It is timely to examine capacity-building within Laois, to enable others to take on the running of projects and programmes, engage more fully with the arts in their own community and growing and diversifying audiences. This will free up the Arts Office to work more strategically, focussing on new developments and opportunities.

Some activities to enable this may include a period of consultation and reflection, training for new cultural producers, service level agreement with third parties, identifying resources to facilitate greater autonomy and independence within the arts sector. We recognise that this is a process that will take time to develop.

Over the course of this agreement we share the desired outcomes that:

- Laois will have a stronger arts sector with a greater number of independent arts organisations, producers and arts managers capable of driving arts development, initiating and managing projects and contributing to the vibrant growth of the county.
- Increased autonomy will have improved investment levels into the arts in Laois.
- The Arts Office will be operating more strategically; spending more time enabling, supporting and building partnerships than on the day to day running of projects and programmes.

- With more people involved in delivering the arts locally, that audiences and participation levels will have expanded and diversified.

Remit of this Agreement

Term

The agreement serves as a commitment to working collaboratively in three 3-year cycles over a period of 8 years, beginning in 2018 and up to 2025, when alongside reviews of Laois Arts Plan 2018 – 2022 and its successor, A Framework for Collaboration and Making Great Art Work will be reviewed. This agreement will be fully reviewed in its final year (2025).

Process

Laois County Council selected the strategic actions within this agreement based on their many years of arts development and investment locally, which has been informed by successive arts plans. They are based on shared actions that will have the most impact on arts development and public engagement in the county over the period of the agreement. The actions are aligned with priorities within the Arts Council and demonstrate how best our shared investment can work together in partnership.

The final agreement was signed off by the Management Team in Laois County Council and the Arts Council. It is agreed that the agreement is a living document that is subject to monitoring and review, to ensure that our shared goals and desired outcomes are achieved.

Roles & Responsibilities

The parties to this agreement have agreed these structures to advance our partnership under A Framework for Collaboration. The framework for these agreements is overseen by the Management Liaison Group (MLG) made up of representatives from the Arts Council Senior Management Executive, and nominees from the Housing, Social & Community and the Economic, Tourism and Development Sub-committees of the CCMA and the Working Group (WG) made up of representatives of the Arts Council executive and nominees from the CCMA, including Directors of Services and Arts Officers.

Review

There will be ongoing review of the progress of the work under this agreement. At the end of the first three year cycle a comprehensive review of its impacts will form the basis for the development of any moderations to the agreement. The partnership and the agreement will be fully and independently reviewed in the final year (2025).

Acknowledging Funding

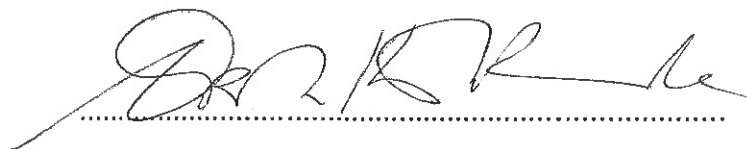
Laois County Council will acknowledge the Arts Council's support of these strategic actions in a number of ways, these include; using the logo on printed and digital material and acknowledging the funding support in press releases, speeches and digital material such as 'this programme / event is strategically funded by Laois County Council in partnership with the Arts Council'. Any changes in Arts Council acknowledgement requirements will be communicated.

Investment

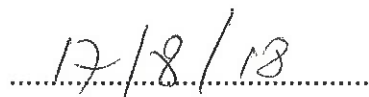
At the signing of this agreement, our 2017 figures show that Laois County Council invests €47,136 and the Arts Council invests €72,900 in these joint programme initiatives operated through the arts office resulting in a combined investment of €120,036. It is our joint intention to raise this investment incrementally over the course of the agreement to ensure our desired outcomes are achieved.

This is in the context of an overall investment in the arts in Laois by Laois County Council of €362,736 and the Arts Council €215,593 resulting in combined investment of €578,329

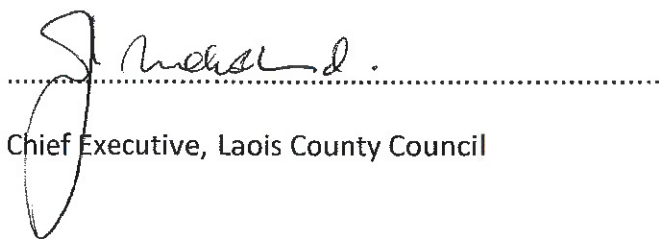
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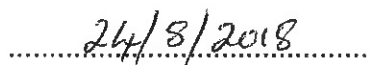
Director, Arts Council



Date



Chief Executive, Laois County Council



Date