



National Circus Festival of Ireland: Climate Action Plan

Our Touchstone

The arts can create a deeply resonant and personal connection to the climate crisis. The arts make an emotional and provocative siren call that can unite our entire community through climate action.

Circus has balance at the heart of many of its disciplines.

Our world is out of balance.

NCFI offers a non-didactic way of speaking to the climate crisis, of offering audiences alternative ways of understanding this imbalance.

We can provoke debate and action through physicality, metaphor and art.

Circus makes the seemingly impossible possible through hard work, dedication and hope.

Maybe, just maybe this can inspire our audiences to hope that together we can right the imbalance in our natural world too.

In devising this policy, we have already made the following actions:

- Booking artists that can facilitate a number of different offerings to the festival, performances, keynote speeches and workshops, thereby maximising the value of their time in Ireland.
- Booking artists that can perform a number of different acts at the festival.

**This Plan has been reviewed by our Board. We understand that the Department of Culture Communications and Sport will issue their Climate Action Plan later in 2025, and this will be followed by further guidance to awardees by the Arts Council. We will formally revise this Plan after this guidance has been issued to ensure we are meeting the standards set by the Arts Council.*



1. Introduction

This Climate Action Plan is part of NCFI's progressive journey of governance. It has been devised with reference to the [EU Green Deal](#) and the Irish [Climate Action Plan](#). We recognized that while small-scale operations like NCFI do not have a significant carbon footprint, reaching our collective carbon reduction targets cannot be achieved without the engagement of every person, organisation and community. We also recognize the unique role that creative industries can play in creating new metaphors that can resonate more than climate facts, creating new emotional connections and assessing existing social norms.

The National Circus Festival of Ireland is an annual event, which takes place in Tralee, Co Kerry. Kerry sits on the western seaboard of Ireland and is extremely vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Tralee forms a low lying hinterland directly on the shores of the Atlantic Ocean. Kerry County Council has created a Climate Action Plan and lays out how a resilient county will look and operate in 2030 and on to 2050, aiming for a 51% reduction in GHG emissions and a 50% improvement in energy efficiency by 2030.

NCFI has a team of 1.5 FTE who work remotely or from [Siamsa Tíre, Ireland's first Green certified theatre](#). Each year we bring circa up to 70 international artists and programmers, to Ireland in addition to up to 30 Ireland-based artists and up to 5000 audience members from Ireland and overseas. The festival takes place in four main venues, as well as our street presence, and delegates stay in various accommodations throughout the town.

This plan is in three phases:

- Actions we are undertaking immediately to reduce our carbon impact
- Actions that we can deliver over the remainder of our current strategic plan, resources permitting
- Actions that will need to be considered should the festival expand its footprint to a new venue

To devise this plan we have reviewed and drawn on: '[The EU Green Deal and Live Performance Organisations](#)' by the European Festivals Association, the [Sustainable Festivals Guidelines](#), 2023, from Fáilte Ireland and The Theatre Green Book, [Sustainable Productions](#). We identified 8 domains where NCFI can take specific action, and our plans are organised against these:





2. Recap: Our Strategic Plan

We have 8 strategic goals grouped under 3 headings - Artists, Audiences & Organisation. Here are those goals through a sustainability lens.

Artists	Support emerging artists through a formal programme, with invested partners, of mentorship, training, showcasing and commissioning.	Enable artists to respond to the climate crisis at a personal, professional (ie livelihood) and artistic level by:
	Champion fair pay and conditions ; be a leader in this field.	Upskilling ourselves on the climate crisis so that we can credibly support our community
	Develop our artist training opportunities offering high level intensives and residency opportunities.	Create opportunities for shared learning on the challenges and opportunities
Audiences	Grow our public engagement with local audiences through investment in our public facing immersive activities and working with our local and national partners to secure a fit for purpose venue.	Recognize that people living in poverty, including artists, will be disproportionately affected by climate change
	Develop and sustain relationships with key community groups and local businesses .	Ensure that we are a credible green festival for audiences through our actions and our programming
	Commit to programming the highest quality experiences for our audiences	Commission climate action specific shows for NCFI, and programme shows that have the capacity to tour across Ireland
		Create a thorough environmental impact assessment as part of the scoping of a fit for purpose venue
		Identify partners who are leaders in sustainability so that we can learn, share, and pool resources
		Adjust our timelines for production to ensure that adhering to our Climate Action Plan does not impact artistic quality



Organisation	Create and sustain an organisation that contributes strategically to the national and international arts landscape by diversifying and growing relevant funding streams.	Investigate and secure funding that increases our capacity to respond to the climate crisis both operationally and artistically as a leader in the Irish circus sector
	Contribute meaningfully to the growth of diversity in contemporary circus.	Ensure that our climate action plan is inclusive of all voices and lived experiences. Treat climate change as a matter of social justice as its impacts disproportionately affect communities already facing pre-existing inequalities.

3. Actions we are undertaking immediately to reduce our carbon impact

Theme	Actions	Lead
Artistic Programme	We have briefed all artists, delegates and programme partners on our commitment to becoming a sustainable festival.	
	Booking artists that can facilitate a number of different offerings to the festival, performances, keynote speeches and workshops, thereby maximising the value of their time in Ireland. Booking artists that can perform a number of different acts at the festival.	
	We will create spaces where artists can reflect on how to produce work sustainably, and to respond to the climate crisis artistically. / Our 'deep dive' conversation, in partnership with ISACS will be on how circus can contribute to sustainability	

Energy & Water	Partner with Siamsa Tíre and our other hosting venues to gain an understanding of our current energy and water usage and identify ways in which we can reduce it	
	Encourage the use of refillable water bottles for all delegates and offer clear signage to water refilling stations	
Resources	Initiate a storytelling session where artists present a physical item from their performance (e.g. prop, costume) and tell the story of how they sourced it, and how it will be used in future	
	Engage all of our hosting venues early in the planning schedule so we can fully understand their waste management practices and ensure that our delegates, artists and audiences can fully engage with them	
Transport	In our communications we will emphasise more sustainable travel options (walking, cycling, public transport, ferry), before car/driving information.	
	We will have an annual prize for the delegate / group of delegates who created the most engaging social media content on their low carbon journey to the festival	
	We will include a question on 'how did you travel to the Festival' in our delegate & artist surveys in order to increase our understanding of our impact	
	All international artists are programmed to both perform/contribute to the Festival programme in another way (for example by facilitating a workshop, joining a panel discussion etc.) thus amplifying their artistic impact. We also strive to ensure that artists who are visiting Ireland have an opportunity to tour, by land, before returning to their home country	
Food & Beverages	We are actively seeking catering partners that have a zero waste approach, or at least have an environment-aware approach to food creation.	

	We encourage use of reusable water bottles and coffee cups at the festival, and we promote public water stations	
Nature & Biodiversity:	The visuals of our strategic plan celebrate the unique wildlife of the region. From the puffins of the Skellig islands to the red deer of Killarney National Park, we use these images to centre ourselves in our local biodiverse environment. Kerry is internationally famous as a special place to visit and we put the unique flora and fauna of Kerry to the forefront of our designs to highlight how precious these are. It speaks to the uniqueness of the area where the festival happens. The arts, like the natural environment, are extremely vulnerable and the first to feel the effects of any seismic (be it environmental or financial!) activity. The festival is a national festival, but is inspired by the geography, flora, fauna and inhabitants of the local area..	
	We make use of Tralee's town park, the second largest urban park in Ireland for our events. This enables our audiences to connect with nature and for us to programme shows that reflect on the biodiversity crisis.	
Governance:	All members of our Board have been involved in devising and approving this plan	
	All members of our Board have undertaken specific upskilling on sustainability	

4. Actions that we can deliver over the remainder of our current strategic plan, resources permitting

- We will work with Siamsa Tíre to calculate our festival's carbon impact . Siamsa Tíre is a leading light in sustainable venues, being Ireland's first Green Certified theatre.
- We want to develop, through commissioning and programming, a circus response to the climate crisis.
- Identifying funding partners to work with us on making our festival more sustainable and helping us with commissioning work.
- Explore the possibility of a Kerry-wide network of green festivals; a joint initiative to make all Kerry Festivals Green Festivals



- We will undertake a paper and digital audit - reducing all print materials and reducing carbon impact of website and emails using the Theatre Green Book, Sustainable Operations for guidance on this
- Undertake a 'production audit' with the Theatre Green Book resources for at least one of the shows presented at the Festival and showcase the learning as part of the festival programme.

5. Actions that will need to be considered should the festival expand its footprint to a new venue

Part of the development plans for the National Circus Festival of Ireland is to secure a fit for purpose venue.

At this juncture the options include a physical building - preferably owned by a public body - but managed by NCFI, or a large capacity circus tent

Either option will require a significant green audit in advance, and both present challenges that will require significant advance planning.

Physical building

Should the building be owned by the State, then it will be part of the national Climate Action Plan and likely to be subject to retrofitting initiatives led by the appropriate Department.

If the building is one we are custodians of, but is not owned by the State, in the absence of other guidance, we will audit the project against the guidelines offered by the [Theatre Green Book Sustainable Buildings toolkit](#).

Tent venue

Should we invest in a mobile tent structure the key considerations will be managing generator sourced power and minimizing biodiversity loss. We have options within our sector which would allow us to run the entire tented show from a mobile battery powered system.