



National Circus Festival of Ireland: Strategy Implementation Plan & EDI action plan

Introduction:

We are on a journey to appreciate the implications and potential complexities of programming artists and engaging audiences that have been historically excluded from the arts. We want to ensure a holistic approach across the festival to ensure EDI is realistic and embedded in our work. In 2023 we adopted our first strategic plan and in 2024 we began in earnest to upskill on EDI issues. This action plan takes our current strategy and examines each objective through the lens of equality, diversity and inclusion. We will review this plan annually, and make changes based on learning, in consultation with those with a range of lived experiences, and as our budgets permit and the world around us changes.

Circus creates death-defying and life-affirming experiences. The aim of our Circus for All action plan is to ensure that circus is something everyone in Ireland can participate in and see themselves reflected in.

This plan is being published as part of our 2024 Festival. Among the key actions we've taken for this festival are:

- We have programmed circus artist Jonny Leich, who is a wheelchair user, as part of our annual *Siamsa Circus* programme. Jonny and their playing partner Tilly Lee-Kronick will also lead a workshop on how to embed access as part of the Festival.
- We are working with the Arts Council's Strategically funded Circus, Street Arts and Spectacle organisations and ISACS to collectively pool our resources and advocate for EDI visibility and change. We are doing this through our annual *Share* event.
- We are working with our international partner Culture Ireland to invite international programmers with an EDI lens.
- Reviewing the accessibility of our language about our venues and events on our website and programme to ensure audiences have easier and increased access.
- Including ISL interpreting at shows for the second year in a row and proactively inviting members of the local d/Deaf community.
- Working with our South West Nexus circus partners Circus Factory, Irish Aerial Creation Centre and Fidget Feet to learn from and support each other through this journey.
- Repeating our 2023 audience survey so that we can gain further insights on the profile of our audience



Among our key learnings to date are:

Good EDI programming and activity takes time and can require additional access budgets.

We need to take incremental steps and build our knowledge base so that we can ensure high quality outcomes for everyone.

We can centre the artist and the audience in order to learn about their needs.

Working with our partners to make sure EDI policy is embedded in a real world sense i.e. our annual planning, logistics, production and general festival operations.

We're excited and scared, but that's ok!

Our Strategic Plan

We have 8 distinct strategic goals grouped under 3 headings:

Artists	Support emerging artists through a formal programme, with invested partners, of mentorship, training, showcasing and commissioning.
	Champion fair pay and conditions ; be a leader in this field.
	Develop our artist training opportunities offering high level intensives and residency 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.
	Develop and sustain relationships with key community groups and local businesses .
	Commit to programming the highest quality experiences for our audiences

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Organisation	Create and sustain an organisation that contributes strategically to the national and international arts landscape by diversifying and growing relevant funding streams.
	Contribute meaningfully to the growth of diversity in contemporary circus.

Our implementation plan for our Strategy including a clear EDI lens

ARTISTS: PRIORITY ACTIONS	Lead	Timing	Resources	EDI lens
A commitment to physical safety when working with NCFI	Core staff team	2024 onwards	Employing professional Riggers with safety statements Working with venues to ensure they are safe and accessible	Technical safety considerations
A commitment to psychological/emotional safety when working with NCFI. Participate in the 'Safe to Create' programme of reform and adopt the Code of Behaviour.	Chair	2024	Safe to Create Resources are free. Prioritisation of time is essential.	Advances culture of safety & understanding of bias
Devise, secure funding for and evaluate a model of support for emerging artists.	Core Staff team and	2026 onwards	2026 create action plan and research appropriate funding 2026/2027 commission	Specific focus on experience of minoritized artists is

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	Board		specifically for emerging artist with EDI focus - including mentoring from Artistic Director and festival as we recognise we need to grow the knowledge, capacity and trust in bringing new artists to the forefront and identifying the team to carry out and support this work	embedded in programmes ISACS research indicates there are currently very few artists active in our sector who identify as being from an ethnic minority.
Further develop and evaluate the impact of our international exchange model.		2026 onwards	2026 - find appropriate funding and partners to work with, for example: Creative Europe, Perform Europe, Culture Moves	By programming international diverse artists we can inspire Irish based artists to partake in our sector.
Continue to create professional opportunities to meet international and national programmers and festival makers with our partner ISACS.		2025 onwards	2025 - work with artforms where there is greater diversity and with local community to identify artists / communities that we can support	

Indicators: In the next three to five years -

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- NCFI is showcasing up to two meaningful, contemporary commissions per year from Irish-based companies. We are creating work together that is top quality, connects to our audiences, and can be programmed internationally.
- Artists working with NCFI feel valued and fairly rewarded, and more artists in our community are demanding and receiving fair pay for their work.
- NCFI supported artists are being programmed internationally.

AUDIENCES : PRIORITY ACTIONS	Lead	Timing	Resources	EDI Lens
Undertake an audit of recent audiences and opportunities for growth, including through venues.	Core staff team	2024 onwards	Basic survey already exists, it can be modified to reflect new learning	Include anonymous diversity data in audience survey year on year to identify new audiences
Invest in our marketing and ticketing systems.		2024 onwards	No additional budget for 2024 - plan for '25/26 festivals annual funding dependant Social Media - not resource intensive, align programming	Ensure marketing channels include outreach to underserved communities



			and audience focus (2024 focus will be wheelchair users and the d/ Deaf community)	
Connect our audience engagement plan with local initiatives for youth and community engagement in the arts.	Rachel Holstead and Core	2025 onwards	Liaise with the Kerry LCYP to develop connections with hard to reach young people. Seek Creative Ireland funding - to devise new outreach programmes Strive to secure funding for a dedicated outreach officer post by 2026	Use audience data to prioritise hardest to reach audiences

Indicators of Success in the next three to five years -

- NCFI is a key moment in the cultural calendar of Tralee, and has strong audience loyalty across different age cohorts and communities.
- NCFI is a trusted partner of local community groups, tourism promoters and the business community.

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→ Our audiences, participants, board and staff are diversified and representative.



ORGANISATION : PRIORITY ACTIONS	Lead	Timing	Resources	EDI lens
Secure statutory funding that enables us to have appropriate fees for year round professional administration of the organisation and for our commissioned artists.	Core staff team and Board	2024 onwards	Need to reassess Arts Council AGF as current funding levels prevent us from doing extra activities outside of the festival	Apply for robust access costs for artists and audiences to ensure embedded access is core to programming and participation
Adopt an EDI policy and action plan with a focus on supporting underrepresented artists and connecting to more diverse audiences COMPLETED	Board and staff together	2024	CBSS application. Ongoing additional resource commitment	Fully EDI focused.
Strengthen the ongoing relationship with our partners, Limerick-based Irish Aerial Creation Centre and Cork's Circus Factory		2024 onwards	South West Circus Nexus - sharing time, knowledge, infrastructure and pitfalls Pooling	Share insights with fellow organisations on best practice in embedded diversity and access.

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			knowledge and resources and experience from other circus sector as leading organisations are developing EDI Policies and action plans Making NCFI lived experienced and learnings of our EDI journey public	
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Indicators of Success: In the next three to five years -

- NCFI has a clear funding model, and is in a position to grow its non-statutory income.
- Contemporary circus is making a meaningful contribution through its artists and audiences to the national conversation on diversity.



- The blossoming of our national expression of contemporary circus through a festival and circus partnership nexus in the south west of Ireland.

Additional specific EDI actions

Within resources available for 2024/25

EDI : PRIORITY ACTIONS	Lead	Timing	Resources
ORGANISATION: Undertake an anonymous diversity survey of Board, Staff and Commissioned Artists to identify areas where we most need to focus. Recruit at least two new additional board members to increase diversity of lived experience on the board	Chair Chair	2024 2025	CBSS application
ARTISTS: Programme Jonny Leitch for Festival 2024, paying artist to lead on a workshop on embedded access, write up and share our learning with others in the sector and with funders	Artistic Director	2024	Core team, Arts Council funding
AUDIENCE: Prioritise physical access for wheelchair users and partner with local organisations that work specifically with young / older	JAC	2024	

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EDI : PRIORITY ACTIONS	Lead	Timing	Resources
wheelchair users inviting them to design access with us and to critique the programme. ISL - Interpreter at shows and direct marketing to dDeaf community			
AUDIENCE: Know before you guides and accessibility notes for festival programme and venues	JAC	2024	