

Theatre Forum – Strategy Consultation

The board and executive have been working to formulate Theatre Forum's 2024-2028 strategy taking account of altered conditions after Covid and anticipating challenges ahead of the performing arts sector. At this point, we would value your feedback, any changes in emphasis and suggestions about the proposed draft strategy and its implementation in 2024-2026. Below is some context for this strategy development.

Context

Over 20 years, Theatre Forum's charitable objectives have been to support, develop, provide resources to members, and raise standards in the performing arts. These are set out in the Constitution:

- to support, develop and promote all aspects of performing arts on the island of Ireland;
- to provide a resource organisation to all members of the Company and to all who profess an interest and commitment to the development of performing arts;
- to raise the standard of arts leadership, management, and governance through the provision of services to the Company's members.

Since 2018, Theatre Forum has described itself as the membership resource organisation that builds a stronger performing arts community:

To strengthen the sector by providing professional development, resources, and events and

To highlight the needs of its diverse member groups, including artists, artworkers and organisations, to secure resources needed for a sustainable performing arts sector.

Right at the start of the strategy review process in 2023, Theatre Forum's roles of making connections, providing services, representing members' interests and issues, as well as enabling and sometimes leading change were acknowledged. So too was Theatre Forum's adaptability and agility in response to the needs of members throughout the Covid period.

We remain convinced Ireland needs a strong and sustainable performing arts ecosystem if our artists are to work, for all our citizens, residents, and communities to have culturally rich experiences, and for Ireland's visitors, friends, and diaspora to appreciate our culture.

Looking ahead, it's likely that a coordinated response from the performing arts sector will be needed to do some of the following: systematically respond to changing economic conditions such as low pay in our sector exacerbated by high inflation; make the case for sustainable careers and living conditions artists and arts workers; stem the loss of technical and production expertise whilst developing new production models; positively change policy, funding and arts provision frameworks as well as delivering on audience development, diversification, access and inclusion responsibilities.

Strategy 2024-2028

To signal a shift in outlook and focus, a new organisation name and tagline are proposed:

Performing Arts Ireland Strengthening Our Sector

This name is used to illustrate the draft strategy.

Vision

Performing Arts Ireland is a forum that supports artists, arts workers, and organisations to build a better connected, more diverse, and stronger community and secures the resources needed to sustain the sector.

Mission

Performing Arts Ireland's mission is to be an effective point of connection for the sector, facilitating opportunities for information sharing and collaboration, carrying out research and collecting evidence to effect change where it is needed, promoting effective models of practice, and providing relevant resources for member artists, arts workers, and arts organisations.

Values

Connection

We believe that knowledge is strength and Performing Arts Ireland is the point where connections are made, and the expertise and resources of the sector are shared.

Change

We believe that the ability to adapt and change is vital to the sector's future and, as required, Performing Arts Ireland is a catalyst for and agent of positive change.

Diversity

We believe that greater diversity leads to a more vibrant arts sector and to embed this value in the organisation, Performing Arts Ireland is inclusive and equitable in all its activities.

Goals

Performing Arts Ireland has three goals:

- Facilitate Connections
- Enable Change
- Provide Resources

Goal 1 Facilitate Connections (for a stronger arts community)

The first goal is to define pathways for members to engage with the organisation and facilitate the creation of deeper connections amongst members as well as across the performing arts community. Activities will be designed to generate higher levels of co-operation and more collaborations amongst the following groups:

- Artists and arts workers
- Arts organisations, including venues and festivals
- Production companies and hubs
- Resource organisations and partners
- Funders and policy makers.

Goal 2 Enable Change

The second goal is to be responsive to the needs of members and work collaboratively with ‘coalitions of the willing’ to model and identify the conditions necessary for systemic change. When needed, collect evidence to influence sectoral policy and strategy formulation and represent member and sectoral interests to partners, funders, and policy makers in the following areas:

- Access and inclusion for artists, arts workers, and audiences
- Artists and their professional development pathways
- Audience development
- Climate action and sustainability
- Employment and welfare
- Models of production and practice.

Goal 3 Provide Resources

The third goal is to provide pathways for members, partners, and stakeholders to engage with the organisation and to provide support and share useful resources with all. The organisation would play several key roles:

- **Service Provider**
To be an obvious provider of useful and accessible resources for members as well as the performing arts sector.
- **Connector/Forum**
Be the forum where people get together and find ways to co-operate and collaborate around sectoral conversations and challenges.
- **Developmental role/ Incubation**
Respond to gaps in ecosystem, support new networks and coalitions to emerge but to become self-sufficient.

Performing Arts Ireland framework

The framework for engagement has three components: members and partners, the agreed goals, and working in responsive, strategic, and collaborative ways to deliver on these goals. This framework would be underpinned by communications to maximise connectivity and engagement with all members, associates, partners, and the sector’s stakeholders.

Evaluation

Agreed criteria would be used to assess the strategic importance of resources and activities. For example:

- How does this activity contribute to the strategic change we are aiming for?
- Does this activity address structural imbalances, diversity, and equity needs?
- Does this activity renew or strengthen existing connections between different parts of the sector?
- Is it possible to communicate with the membership or sector about this activity, make it visible, and to find ways to engage others/ join more dots/build connections?
- How could this expertise or these resources be made available in accessible, opensource and inclusive ways?
- Is this a valuable addition to the Performing Arts Ireland resources?

Appendix 1.

Theatre Forum 2023 activities

Here's an overview of Theatre Forum's current activities for your reference in answering our interview and survey questions.

| Activity | Description |
|---|---|
| Gathering event A 260+ person gathering event. | The 2023 Waterford Gathering event was an open forum where artists and arts organisations programmed to provide inspiration and promote connectivity and conversation between members, artists and other organisations and stakeholders. |
| Research Pay and Conditions Audience Insights | Collection of quantitative and qualitative evidence to effectively represent the concerns of members to the sector's stakeholders and make the case for resources for a more sustainable sector. |
| Member Meetings Member, Marketing Forum and Arts Centre Working Group meetings. | Member Meetings are a core activity and involves a busy programme of in-person and live-streamed meetings and online events and training backed up by website resources. |
| Green Arts Initiative in Ireland Support members with advice, online meetings, and a Green Desk | The Initiative shares and disseminates expertise to organisations looking to work more sustainably. Findings and reports from earlier and ongoing projects, Greening Venues and Greener Touring, will be shared with the sector and provide useful 'How to...' information. |
| EDI policy review Theatre Forum EDI policy review Intercultural network workshop | An interim review will prioritise actions for the year ahead as well as informing Theatre Forum's next 2024-2026 strategy. Theatre Forum's EDI policy (and any revisions thereof) will continue to be shared with members. |
| MAKE Residential artist development programme for 15 artists | A long-running collaboration between partners Cork Midsummer Festival, Dublin Fringe Festival, Project Arts Centre, and Theatre Forum. Inaugurated in 2009, MAKE is an annual laboratory where ideas for new performance work are developed with the mentorship of three renowned international theatre artists and for some, in collaboration with other participants. |
| The Next Stage Immersive Dublin Theatre Festival experience for 20 theatre makers | An artist development programme designed around Dublin Theatre Festival's programme and administered by Theatre Forum. It offers a group of 20 theatre-makers an immersive, facilitated Dublin Theatre Festival experience over the festival to develop their practice, career, and their network. |
| TYAI Support for a partner organisation | Act as a 'host' organisation to assist TYAI to access funding in order to progress its activities for members and deliver on its strategic objectives. |
| Shared Island Convene a meeting of Ireland and NI resource organisations to respond to the ARINS report | After Brexit and emerging from Covid, tackle the inherent challenges for artists and companies working on these islands and across our borders. Considering EU-UK developments on mobility, work and travel, work with long-standing partnership with Theatre and Dance NI to formulate a joint response to the ARINS report, <i>The future of cross-border cooperation in the arts</i> . |