

January 23rd 2019

Clare Public Participation Network Submission to the Clare County Arts Plan 2019- 2024

Clare Public Participation Network sought input via email, social media and through a focus - group meeting on the following submission.

Part one of the document below lists the responses made to four specific discussion questions posed during our focus group.

Part two develops some of these responses further and includes some more general suggestions for inclusion in the 2019 – 2024 arts plan which result from the wider discussion had at our meeting and from other contributions. We have endeavoured to include all suggestions made to us in this submission.

NB: Clare PPN's focus group requested that Clare Arts Office would publish a draft County Arts Plan 2019- 2024 following this call for input and provide a further window for feedback on the draft before the County Arts Plan 2019- 2024 is adopted.

Part one:

Q1. Does everyone in Clare have access to the arts? If no, can you list who might experience exclusion?

Migrants and those from ethnic minorities
Those without cars or accessible transport
Men are underrepresented in many community arts spheres particularly choirs
Those on low income
People with disabilities
Children
Clare's Travelling Community
Asylum seekers
LGBTQ community not visible
Older people
People who have difficulties with literacy or confidence
Single parents

Q2. Can you think of any strategies or projects to ensure these people are included?

A subsidised ticket scheme for those on low incomes
The arts office and wider council should sponsor multicultural events.
Clare Arts Office Social media must be more active
Increased staff in Arts Office
Clarity of communication to ensure access
Venue/resources supporting all genres of music
After school arts made more available and accessible
Youth arts officer
Free tickets for excluded communities
Drama to be encouraged in school
Support for performing artists that does not depend on profitability of venture
A venue for daytime theatre
A theatre company for disabled people
An arts programme focusing on and run by people with disabilities
Events organised to incorporate arts experiences for adults and children

Q3. Can you think of any ways in which supports for artists to live and work in Clare could be improved?

Develop artist networks of support
Grants made available at the time of expenditure (not to re-couped afterwards) as the current model excludes many artists.
Quarterly seminars for artists to network and find out about funding
Affordable venues (Glor too expensive) and rehearsal space
Access to tech and facilities
Collaborative art spaces /hubs throughout the county
Many artists struggle with grant applications and need support

Q4 Do you have any specific suggestions for actions or projects to be included in the arts plan?

Dedicated person to attract and manage small festivals
Venue in Shannon to be supported and used more
Annual arts event in Clare such as Clare Arts Festival or similar.
An audit of artistic spaces in the county and spaces that could be used as art spaces, collated and advertised
Clare Arts Office should promote individual artists (be more open to new people) this could be done with a dedicated website and an artist of the month feature or similar.
A dedicated website that is up to date with current projects, events, grants, venue, exhibitions etc.
Expand Embrace into ongoing arts programme using 'That's Life' model as inspiration
More use of Artist in Residence schemes (especially someone from historically excluded groups)
An agreement reached with places such as Shannon Heritage, Shannon Airport, Cliffs Visitor Centre etc etc (eg: minimum 30%) to sell Clare art and prioritise local artists (CDs, painting, crafts etc.)
Arts Plan must mention the benefit of art on mental health.
The expansion of small programmes such as the Poetry Hour in Ennis Library to other libraries.
Increase support for the staging and performance of social drama both professional productions and community productions- in order to engage people with social issues.
It was also noted that Voice Coaching is way to engage young people in the arts and build social confidence and that there may be opportunities for this to be supported as an entry point.

Part Two:

Ethos: Those consulted wished to begin this submission by requesting that the Clare County Arts Plan 2019 -2024 includes a statement on the inestimable value of art and art opportunities to the diverse communities' resident in Clare. They noted the current tendency by institutions and government departments of valuing art for how it contributes to tourism and to Ireland's reputation abroad and would like to make sure that the new Arts Plan for County Clare values the contribution that access to high-quality artistic output, experiences and opportunities has for all of those resident in the County. Our groups noted that social inclusion, improved educational outcomes, positive mental health, community spirit and social innovation are all enhanced by a thriving artistic community in the county and that they would like see the new Arts Plan focus on supporting and widening that artistic community and ensuring that artists in particular are targeted with supports and resources to enable them to live fruitful creative lives in Clare.

Staffing: It was agreed by those at our focus group that the arts office of Clare County Council is under resourced in staffing terms in relation to its importance for Clare. It was noted that there is a feeling amongst some artists that the arts office is not 'open' to them. Clare Public Participation Network recommends that a commitment to increasing communications from the arts office be included in the new plan. **Communications Officer:** Specifically Clare PPN's focus group recommends that a dedicated website would be set up and kept updated with the aim of promoting the arts in Clare and the work of the arts office itself as well as providing a newsletter of events in the County, and that this should be backed up by a comprehensive social media presence. It was recognised by all involved that the provision of such a service would necessitate an increase in staffing for the arts office and Clare PPN recommends that this increase is provided for by Clare County Council. Clare PPN's focus group further recommended that the recruitment of a dedicated **Youth Arts Officer** for the County would be beneficial in order to maximise the availability of arts experiences for those under 25 and to support community groups and organisations to deliver after-school/ summer camp type arts opportunities across a range of arts disciplines.

Clare PPN focus group also suggested that the creation of a post within the Council for a dedicated **'Festivals Officer'** who would be retained to assist local communities with getting festivals up and running and with attracting and supporting larger festivals or artistic events to come to the county.

Making full use of existing resources

Those who participated in our focus group stressed the importance of Glor Theatre as a resource and venue in the county. The consensus on its activities were that it should be funded, staffed and resourced to ensure that its role can be widened out for more extensive and affordable community use including technical support whilst also maintaining its own programme of artistic and commercial events. It was the view of those who contributed to our consultation that much more community benefit could be gained from Glor and that it should be used fully to contribute to a thriving artistic community in the County.

Our focus group also noted a lack of available and affordable rehearsal and performance space for artists and young people in the Clare. They recommended that a survey of the available facilities in the county from Community Centres to schools and other such buildings be carried out with a view to making agreements with the management of these facilities that they may be made available to local artists or arts groups at reasonable rates. It is envisaged that the County

Council's Arts Office, Culture Team and Rural Development Directorate would be in a position to conduct this evaluation.

Our focus group support and value the commitment to Traditional music that exists in Clare and they would like to see an increased commitment to other forms of original music within this current arts plan. Some of the ways in which this might be practically realised would include an increase in support to the artists involved by way of targeted grants, as well as the provision of rehearsal space, recording facilities and promotional and performance opportunities for a wide range of original music artists. As well as expanding the role and remit of Glor, our focus group would like to see support for the Shannon Venue from Clare County Council and would like to ensure that the needs of musicians and other artists for space to work and meet in are written into plans such as those for the new 'cultural quarter' which will result from the building of the new county Library.

Making existing opportunities easier to access

Clare PPN recommends that the new Arts Plan should include a commitment to examine ways in which the 'bureaucratic' demands on artists and amateur groups can be minimised. It was noted for example that amongst visual artists many people have expressed difficulties with formal form filling and the accounting processes required. Clare PPN recommends that working with the National Adult Literacy Agency on drafting applications for funding or commissions might be one way to address this.

Clare PPN also notes that as with all community group initiatives insurance costs and requirements are a big demand on group's resources. Our focus group suggested that Clare County Council should examine ways in which this might be minimised in terms of the use of Council owned or managed properties.

Artists Incomes: It also should be acknowledged that many artists fall into the category of people on low incomes and that as such all funding opportunities recognise this and make provision for the immediate drawdown of at least a portion of the funding upfront to ensure that artists have the working capital they need to begin the projects they have successfully received funding for. Clare PPN would also like to see the new Arts Plan commit to exploring ways to increase artists' income in the county. One suggestion was that organisations such as Shannon Heritage, GeoPark, etc would undertake to ensure that they stock and provide space for artists to sell and promote their work/ music. Clare PPN suggests that a collaboration with LEO might be useful for such a scheme.

Our focus group suggested too that attention might be paid to the inclusion or development of events where parents and children could attend together, or to events held simultaneously so that single parents could attend an adult-oriented arts event while their child had a supervised arts experience/workshop or performance at the same time. A quarterly event or even twice yearly event held on this basis would be a real contribution to inclusion.

Invitations to participation:

Our focus group were particularly enthusiastic about the success of the existing Embrace for Arts and Disabilities programme and would like to see the support for this programme increased and the programme itself expanded with participants to the forefront. It was suggested that the 'That's Life' Programme in Galway would be good model to examine in this regard.

Our group also noted that the Clare County Council Age and Opportunity Initiative appears to be very successful and they would like to see it continuing and supported.

Our focus group recognised several groups who live in County Clare who are underrepresented in the current artistic programme and in wider artistic circles. Our group considered that it might be necessary that the Arts Plan 2019- 2024 includes a direct, express invitation to participate that names those communities – the following suggestions were made-

The Arts Plan 2019 – 2020 should aim to support and promote at least one annual event celebrating Traveller music and culture and their contribution to the wider culture. It is felt that a targeted bursary, award, artist in residence programme or other funded opportunity should also be offered to a member of the Travelling Community. Participation from this community should also be encouraged and supported in all other programmes and activities included in the plan.

The Arts Plan 2019 – 2020 should also recognise the artistic talent and ability to contribute that exists within the community of asylum seekers resident in Clare and aim to provide opportunities such as specific bursaries, awards and performance opportunities for those who are interested as well as ensuring that their inclusion is encouraged in all other programmes and activities.

The Arts Plan 2019 – 2020 should aim to reflect the fact that more than one tenth of the people who live in Clare are either first or second generation immigrants from other places. It should seek opportunities for this diverse group of people to contribute to and benefit from the County Arts plan. It may be beneficial for the arts office to hold meetings with such groups (for example only) as the Nigerian Community in Clare, IDEC and where possible support events such as the PolskaEire Festival or other similar initiatives.

It was also noted that there is no significant visible presence of the LGBTQ community in Clare either in the arts or in Community Groups and it was felt that it would be beneficial to promote or invite this involvement whether by creating an **artist in residence programme** or a **particular funded opportunity** within the new Arts Plan.

Our focus group noted that organisations such as the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, the Community Foundation of Ireland and others have funding available annually that may be available for such targeted awards and bursaries and that a sufficiently staffed Arts Office would be able to have the capacity to investigate and follow through with securing such sources of external funding.

Artists Networking, Collaboration and Peer Support

Our focus group noted the absence of meetings or of an official forum where they can meet network and support each other. It has been noted that steps are being made such as Glor's Supper Club etc to provide those opportunities but from the group discussions it seems there is a demand for a wider ranging series of networking events such as for example opportunities to collaborate across disciplines. One of the key ideas was a dedicated meeting space or hub for artists to use for events and workshops, professional development opportunities and for coming together to have their voices heard at policy level. This space could be in an existing cultural venue. Clare PPN expresses its willingness in this submission to assist the artistic community in Clare in networking and having their voices heard at local government level in Collaboration with the Arts Office.

Many thanks for this opportunity to contribute to Clare's County Arts,

Please contact Clare PPN should you have any questions or require clarification on any of the above.

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