



Strategic Plan 2024 – 2029

Introduction

I am pleased to present the Signal Arts Centre Strategic Plan for the next five years to our members, artists, stakeholders, and the wider community. Grounded in transparency and the commitment to provide the highest standards of service and support, this plan sets out our vision for growth and development of Signal Arts Centre.

Signal Arts Centre plays a key role in delivering on national policies at a local level to foster creativity and promote artistic expression. We believe that participation in, and appreciation of, the arts is hugely valuable in enriching the lives of the individual and contributes to a vibrant cultural environment and quality of life.

This is an ambitious strategy – one that requires continued support from many sources to make it a reality.

Signal Arts Centre is a working artist centre. We offer a space for artists to flourish, to make compelling works, to connect with the community and contribute to the cultural fabric of Bray and its environs. We provide opportunities for artists to create and sell their works, to meet other artists and share possibilities of collective support, cultural production and income generation.

I sincerely thank our staff artists and support personnel. They work with passion and enthusiasm, embody our core values, and have managed the increasing demand on our services. They never fail to impress me, and their ongoing commitment is central to implementing our ambitious goals.

I would like to thank my fellow Board members, the Signal Arts Centre Creative Director, the Signal Arts Centre member artists and the many other stakeholders who provided their input into shaping this strategic plan and into identifying how Signal Arts Centre can best support the community it serves in the future.

Emma Finucane

Signal Arts Centre Chairperson

About Signal Arts Centre

Signal Arts Centre is an artist-led gallery and workspace. We believe that art should be inclusive. Our aim is to facilitate increased participation in, and appreciation of, the arts. We play a vital role within our community - contributing to individual development and employment, to quality of life and to an inclusive local culture.

In existence for over 30 years, Signal Arts Centre was founded in 1990 by a group of NCAD Fine Art graduates in response to the Artists Association of Ireland's (AAI) call for artists to set up their own Social Employment Schemes (SES). In the early years, the Members set out an exhibitions policy devised to give artists peer reviewed opportunities to show and sell their work. They developed community workshops and facilitated artists to take part in regional and national cultural events.

Signal Arts Centre has come a long way from its humble beginnings to its current location at 1A Albert Avenue with a larger gallery and more accessible workspaces. We became an independent not-for-profit company in 1999 and purchased the property. We now have a ceramics room, shareable workspace, darkroom, and studio enabled by a combination of fundraising, voluntary contributions, and much welcomed community grants.

Today, in 2024, we remain true to the original beliefs and ethos of Signal Arts Centre. Our range of services include socially engaged practices that deliver to the needs of artists and connect with the local community.

Many of our staff artist and support positions are held by participants of the Community Employment Programme (CEP - the successor to SESs). The CEP, administered by the Department of Social Protection, is designed to help people who are long-term unemployed or otherwise disadvantaged to get back to work by offering part-time and temporary placements in jobs based within local communities.

At Signal Arts Centre we see the value for recent eligible graduates to de-institutionalise from college, meet professional practising artists, develop proposals and to acquire the practical skills not otherwise covered in art college. For those returning to the arts, they get the opportunity to refresh their practice and catch up with recent developments through our education and training programme. All staff artist participants take part in invigilation, hanging and facilitating openings, selection panels, community workshops and assisting professional artists who use the Centre. Our administration and web management staff provide invaluable support and continuously adapt to the ever-changing nature of the centre's needs.

The majority of our CE participants advance to secure employment, start their own professional artistic practice or go on to further education. The CEP provides an invaluable pathway for emerging artists and those in supporting roles to progress in their careers and contribute to a diverse art community. We believe that their success is our success.

Through this Strategic Plan, Signal Arts Centre aims to build on its success so that more artists can thrive, produce exciting works, and connect with the community. Our ambition is for the visual arts to become a part of peoples' lives, whether through practice, experience or appreciation.

Our Vision

Signal Arts Centre is *the* thriving cultural organisation that supports artists and fosters arts participation, appreciation and recognition throughout the community.

Our Mission

As an inclusive and vibrant creative centre, we:

- ✓ **Support** working artists of today and tomorrow by providing space, education, training and opportunity;
- ✓ **Connect** art and culture with the community;
- ✓ **Champion** a diverse and networked membership through Signal Art Society; and
- ✓ **Promote** the value of the arts and its benefits to the wider community.

Our Values

Our values guide and shape our behaviours, procedures, relationships and decisions. We value:

- ✓ **Fostering Creativity** – placing the artist at the core of our activities, supporting training and growth, providing space and opportunity, and promoting compelling art; continuously seeking new and better ways to engage our members and the wider public.
- ✓ **Openness**– through a belief that art is for all, creating a welcoming environment and making it easy to engage whether through participation or appreciation; open to new ideas and free from aesthetic, political or cultural bias; involving diverse communities and raising awareness of the value of the arts.
- ✓ **Collaboration** – connecting with others to achieve our goals to mutual benefit, including the disadvantaged, the business community, funding bodies, and arts organisations.
- ✓ **Integrity** – upholding ethical standards, showing respect for others, and maintaining an accountable, open and transparent culture.

Our Strategic Objectives

Strategic Objective 1	Enhance services provided to working artists, our Members and the community
Strategic Objective 2	Strengthen connections , promotion and communications
Strategic Objective 3	Modernise facilities – protect what we have and expand for the future
Strategic Objective 4	Deepen expertise and sustainability to position Signal Arts Centre for growth
Strategic Objective 5	Apply best practice to everything we do

Strategic Objective 1 – Enhance the services provided to working artists, our Members and the community

As an integral part of the community, the challenge is to ensure that Signal Arts Centre remains relevant and engaging and that our initiatives are accessible by all. We recognise the need to respond to changing practices, needs and demographics. We will enhance our arts programme over the next five years delivering to the needs of our CE staff artists, Members, artists in the locality, and the wider community. We will ensure that the Centre continues to operate as *the* meeting place for artists and those interested in the arts.

We will:

- ✓ Enhance the services and supports we offer including socially engaged practices through collaborative, community-driven initiatives;
- ✓ Explore, identify and deliver a variety of opportunities for working artists, including: residencies; workshops; talks; and training events;
- ✓ With a focus on Signal Arts Society Members, identify ways to enhance services offered and to stimulate greater engagement and networking;
- ✓ Expand our Outreach Programme of community arts projects. Through active engagement and collaboration, make artists available as a resource to local voluntary groups, schools and local community groups to mutual benefit.

Strategic Objective 2 - Strengthen connections, promotion and communications

We passionately believe in the value of the arts and culture to develop the individual; build local collective identity; foster inclusion, sense of belonging and pride of place; and to enhance social health and economic activity. The real value of arts lies in its ability to connect people across cultural boundaries. We believe that participation in and/or appreciation of the arts is a possibility for all. Nevertheless, more people in our environs need to know who we are, what we do and how to engage with us.

We will:

- ✓ Develop the Centre as part of the national arts infrastructure and will contribute to the development of arts policy nationally and locally by developing stronger relationships with other arts organisations and statutory bodies;
- ✓ Advocate the distinctive and vital role of the artist in society and in national cultural policy. We will achieve this by expanding our use of stimulating podcasts and videos; publishing informative and topical content on our website and newsletter; and increasing audience engagement;
- ✓ Develop and implement an external communication plan aimed at broadening and deepening our collaboration with the wider community including schools, charities, businesses in the wider locale, arts associations, and the general public;
- ✓ Improve the consistency of our marketing and communications programme and promote our range of service offerings;
- ✓ Identify potential partnerships and develop effective collaborative relationships over five years;
- ✓ Develop and deliver an internal communication plan so that:
 - staff, SAS Members and volunteers have a shared vision of who we are and what we do; and
 - open, two-way communications between all parties is promoted to ensure we continually develop and deliver excellence in our services.
- ✓ Broaden our prospective membership base by taking a targeted approach in promoting the highly valued services offered;
- ✓ Update the artists' page to include more Members, elicit testimonials and encourage Members to spread the word on the benefits of our offerings.

Strategic Objective 3 – Modernise, protect, and expand facilities

If we are to realise our ambition, it is crucial that we upgrade our existing premises at 1A Albert Avenue and explore options to expand.

We will:

- ✓ Upgrade basic building facilities including office and storage spaces and heating and ventilations systems;
- ✓ Upgrade artists facilities including gallery space, ceramic space, dark room, workshop areas, educational facilities, and technical equipment;
- ✓ Explore the possibility of extending the footprint of our existing premises to incorporate additional workshop areas and studio spaces for artists;
- ✓ Apply an Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) lens in investment decisions to maximise the sustainability of the Centre;
- ✓ Develop a long-term strategic facility plan with a 10-15 year horizon and define what is required to underpin the future development of Signal Arts Centre.

Strategic Objective 4 – Deepen expertise and sustainability

We are proud of the achievements of Signal Arts Centre and are ambitious to do more. We are aware that future sustainable growth is dependent on strengthening our human and financial resources.

We are governed by an independent Board. The organisation is led by a Creative Director, supported by working artists and staff. We believe in ensuring that our Board Members are active participants in the development of Signal. We believe in having a Board with a diverse membership, expertise, and experience. We are also aware of the potential to engage with volunteers in the local community who are enthusiastic about the arts and are eager to get involved.

To deliver on our vision, it is a strategic priority that we identify and secure appropriate levels of funding in a way that is practicable and sustainable.

We will strengthen the Board of Signal:

- ✓ Effectively manage rotation and succession planning of Board Membership to ensure a balance of experience, expertise, knowledge and newcomers;
- ✓ Maintain Board annual effectiveness self-assessments and implement modifications if and as required;
- ✓ We will implement our volunteer policy to harness expertise and enthusiasm in a structured way to mutual benefit, explicitly acknowledging the terms of value exchange in accordance with the best practice principles set out by the Arts Council.

We will continue to develop management and staff:

- ✓ Develop relevant processes to ensure consistent delivery of services, retention of institutional memory and capture of fresh ideas and initiatives to deliver future growth and stability;
- ✓ Identify and deliver relevant on-the-job and formal training, supported by accurate policies, procedures, and documentation;
- ✓ Continue to effectively manage the CE scheme and develop a reporting mechanism to capture data, monitor progress and evidence outcomes achieved;
- ✓ Source external advisors with the necessary experience and experience to fill gaps, as appropriate.

In terms of funding, we will:

- ✓ Establish a Funding sub-committee with appropriate expertise and knowledge with the objective of identifying ways by which we can expand and diversify funding streams in the short term;
- ✓ Develop a medium/long-term funding needs assessment, for both future capital and operational requirements and informed by the long-term strategic facility plan, identify potential funding sources to include membership, gallery, the public and private sectors, and set out a 5-year plan;
- ✓ Develop and maintain relationships with funding bodies and commissioning agencies.

Strategic Objective 5 – Apply best practice to everything we do

We believe that best practice starts with our everyday activities – in how we greet visitors, manage exhibitions, engage with the community and deliver a high-quality experience.

Signal Arts Centre prides itself on complying with good governance practice and standards. We believe that setting and maintaining high standards demonstrates accountability to our artists, funders, and the community. We will continue to operate within the letter and the spirit of all relevant regulatory and compliance requirements.

We will:

- ✓ Embed a system of recording, monitoring and review so that we actively live our values and continuously improve how we engage with others and deliver services;
- ✓ Review and evidence our compliance with all relevant regulatory and legislative requirements, including the Charities Governance Code 2018 and Guidelines for Charitable Organisations on Fundraising from the Public;
- ✓ Review and update the Constitution to appropriately reflect its charitable purpose;

- ✓ Enhance our risk management framework and table a report at each meeting of the Board of Directors; and
- ✓ Adopt the Guidelines for Charitable Organisations on Fundraising from the Public (Charities Institute of Ireland) and implement relevant training.

Outcomes

We are aware that measuring the value of the arts is challenging, yet we know that the impacts are far reaching. Arts and culture spur creativity and imagination, deepen cross-cultural understanding and contribute to individual development. Furthermore, arts and culture contribute to building local identity and pride of place, to enhancing quality of life and social health, to attracting tourists and to economic activity. While economic impacts are more readily quantified, they in no way capture the full essence of the arts. The intrinsic value lies in the enrichment of human experience, the fostering of expression, cultural preservation, and connecting people across cultural boundaries.

Nevertheless, we at Signal believe that it is important for the organisation's future development that we demonstrate the value we bring to artists and to the wider community. With that in mind, we will:

- ✓ For our CEP scheme, deliver consistent high progression rates and improve quality of progression pathways;
- ✓ Manage unrestricted funding so that it forms at least 30% of total by 2029, to enable us to invest, develop and grow Signal Arts Centre;
- ✓ Increase footfall to our gallery, workshops and classes to reach 10,000 for the year by 2029, as a measure of engagement and encouraging participation in the arts;
- ✓ Demonstrate visible improvement in offices and workshop facilities;
- ✓ Have the expertise, skill and resilience at board and executive level to deliver on our strategic ambitions;
- ✓ Achieve Charities Institute Triple Lock Standard – ethical fundraising, annual reporting and governance.

Wider policy context

Signal Arts Centre does not operate in a vacuum. Delivering at a community level, our centre is a crucial part of the national arts and culture infrastructure. Aligned with the objectives of the Arts Council, we place a focus on supporting the artist so that they can make work of ambition and quality and be remunerated appropriately; and on engaging with the community so that more people will enjoy high quality arts experiences.

Relevant national and regional policies include:

- ✓ Culture 2025, A National Cultural Policy Framework to 2025, Government of Ireland;
- ✓ Making Great Art Work, Strategic Plan, 2016-2025, Arts Council;
- ✓ Project Ireland 2040 National Development Plan, Government of Ireland;
- ✓ Wicklow County Development Plan, 2022-2028;
- ✓ Arts Office Strategic Plan, Wicklow County Council;
- ✓ Paying the Artist, An Arts Council policy on the fair and equitable remuneration and contracting of artists, 2020.
- ✓ Exploring the dimensional structures of the arts in communities, by Subg, H, Hagar M.A. Kushmer R. 2020.