



Clár Éire Ildánach
Creative Ireland
Programme



Rialtas Áitiúil Éireann
Local Government Ireland



Culture & Creativity Strategy

2023–2027



Mayo

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Foreword

Contemporary yet historic, with incredible natural, archaeological, built, cultural and maritime heritage - as well as three Gaeltacht areas - there is an abundance of cultural inspiration in Mayo. Culture and heritage are at the heart of Mayo's identity and quality of life. They are central to making it a vibrant county that is an attractive destination for tourists, residents of the county and the creative industries. In many ways Mayo has the perfect combination of an inspiring landscape and a renowned cultural infrastructure, in which culture and creativity can grow and thrive.

Home to Ireland's most spectacular coastal scenery, rivers and lakes, a unique bogland along with a fine built heritage, the county's history stretches back thousands of years to Ireland oldest field system, the Céide Fields. It is this wealth and diversity of heritage, natural, built and cultural that gives the county its unique identity and character. Mayo's culture and creativity is inspired by, and reflected in, the material heritage and cultural landscape of the county. Conversely our material culture helps to define our county's identity, sense of place and character.

Yet our greatest resource is our people. Mayo boasts a thriving creative sector that includes writers, artists, performers and people who are active in their community in arts, creative activities and culture. This enhances the quality of life, wellbeing and character of the place. The important role of communities in heritage management, promotion and development at a local level, is also central to what makes the Mayo identity. And our community extends far beyond our borders. As an outward looking county, that has always been engaged with the wider world through our maritime history and diaspora, we are delighted to welcome and embrace people choosing to make this county their home, a place to invest in, or a place to visit and enjoy.

There are so many examples of what makes Mayo unique – from our maritime history haunted by the ghost of Granuaile, to our bogs and ancient Céide Fields, to our dramatic landscape that has inspired artists and authors alike. Our musical tradition has attracted global audiences in the shape of Riverdance which was born as part of the Mayo 5000 celebrations while our literary heritage stretches from Raifteirí and George Moore to our young prizewinning authors of today - Sally Rooney, Mike McCormack, Elizabeth Reapy, Eimear MacBride and many more. In a different sphere of creativity Louis Brennan, inventor of the torpedo, was born in Castlebar over one hundred years ago.

Our primary instrument of community engagement is through local government. As a local authority, strongly invested in cultural and heritage infrastructure and provision, Mayo County Council is delighted to present this second Creative Ireland five-year strategy which will continue to place culture and creativity at the centre of our lives. The societal benefits from expenditure on the arts and the role of culture in building cohesive and sustainable communities are now widely accepted. Mayo County Council prides itself on its work in promoting heritage, libraries, arts, and creativity and this initiative allows us to continue to align our practice to national policy and the five pillars prioritised by Creative Ireland.

With enviable resources allocated to culture and heritage throughout the county, Mayo has been well placed to avail of the extraordinary opportunities presented through Creative Ireland. Mayo County Council has long invested in the area's cultural capital and over the last twenty years has commissioned and supported an array of festivals, exhibitions, residencies, school projects and public art programmes to grow and sustain local arts development. Through our extensive library, museums and arts infrastructure, we endeavour to

reach all members of our communities. Initiatives such as Heritage Week, Bealtaine, Culture Night, Mayo Day, The Wild Atlantic Way Festival and the Children's Book Festival showcase all that is good in the creative and cultural sector in Mayo throughout the year. Our flagship publicly owned facilities such as The Museum of Country Life, the Jackie Clarke Collection, Ballycroy National Park and recent initiatives such as the development of the Mary Robinson centre and the purchase of the historic Moore Hall and Castlebar Military Barracks highlight our commitment to investing in the creative and cultural infrastructure of the county.

There are many other services and staff in our Local Authority, that also connect to the ethos of Creative Ireland, such as those working in community development, in the Local Enterprise Office, in tourism, with young people, in Age-Friendly Services and in the Communications Office. These connections have been strengthened and expanded over the first five-year strategy.

We believe that the opportunity created through Creative Ireland will allow us to further develop and expand our cultural and creative future. We are well placed for ongoing coordinated cooperation between our arts, heritage and library services and the creative sector. We welcome the challenges inherent in Creative Ireland and look forward to harnessing it to show the best of what our county has to offer. We have the utmost belief in the Mayo Creative Ireland team which has brought together expertise in arts, heritage, libraries and literature, tourism and enterprise. In Mayo every penny of Creative Ireland funding has been spent on artists and creatives – not a penny has been spent on administration or consultants. Through our Creative Ireland Culture and Creativity Team (and indeed all our staff) we are ready to take on this challenge over the next five years because we firmly believe that the implementation of our Creative Ireland

strategy will lead to a better Mayo. By collaborating with all stakeholders, we aim to position culture and creativity at the centre of public life in Mayo by 2027. We invite all citizens and visitors to participate in this journey and to enjoy and experience Mayo's culture and heritage, imagination and creativity.

Kevin Kelly

Chief Executive, Mayo County Council

Cllr. Seamus Weir

Cathaoirleach, Mayo County Council

1 Creative Ireland 2023–2027

The Creative Ireland Programme is an all-of-government initiative committed to enhancing access to, engagement with, and enjoyment of Ireland’s culture and creativity. Within the broad range of available definitions, creativity is considered as *a set of innate abilities and learned skills; the capacity of individuals and organisations to transcend accepted ideas and norms and by drawing on imagination to create new ideas that bring additional value to human activity.*

The vision of the Creative Ireland Programme 2023–2027 is to mainstream creativity in the life of the nation so that individually and collectively, in our personal lives and in our institutions, we can realise our full creative potential thereby promoting individual, community and national wellbeing.

The Creative Ireland Programme will deliver through collaboration and partnership promoting understanding and appreciation of the value of creativity in all its forms — whether through the arts, culture, heritage, or technology.

The Creative Ireland Programme will prioritise its work around five aspects for the period 2023–2027:

1. Creative Youth
2. Creative Communities
3. Creative Industries
4. Creative Health and Wellbeing
5. Creative Climate Action and Sustainability

Through the Creative Ireland Programme, *Creative Communities* supports the partnership between the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, and Ireland’s local authorities. This partnership enables citizens and communities to explore their culture and creativity at local level and, where appropriate, leverage that creativity to strengthen wellbeing, advance social cohesion and support economic development.

Creative Communities is also innovative in deploying creativity to achieve greater integration across targeted policy priorities. This has delivered new creative engagement initiatives in relation to for example children and young people, older persons, climate action, and local economies. Individuals’ and communities’ perception about the role and value of culture and creativity as central to our wellbeing in its broadest sense is being enhanced.

The opportunity embraced within the Mayo Culture and Creativity Strategy 2023–2027 is to support people’s participation, inclusion and expression within communities, and further strengthen local creative economies.



Monasteries of the Moy – Tourism Department, Mayo County Council



Newport, Co. Mayo. Tourism Department, Mayo County Council

2 Culture and Creativity in Mayo

Mayo occupies a unique position in terms of culture and heritage. It is the third largest county in the country, with the longest coastline and with a population of over 130,000 and the strongest diaspora. Central to this identity is the strength of its culture, which extends through language, place, heritage (natural and built), beliefs, art, sport, community, geography, social customs, design, history, traditional skills, landscape, biodiversity, film, photography, music, literature, dance, story, creative industries and cultural diversity. But culture is not static – it is constantly evolving. Mayo has ensured that creativity is pivotal in its present and future while preserving the richness of its past.

Landscape

On the western edge of Ireland and Europe, separated from America by the Atlantic Ocean, Mayo inhabits a unique physical space: stunningly beautiful landscape (seas, mountains, lakes, bogs, skies, hills, woodlands), town-lands, tiny villages to large business towns, all with a strong sense of identity and place, evidenced by the complexity of place-names, music, song, folk memory and their own unique local histories. Mayo's landscape has always attracted visual artists, photographers and others seeking a soulful experience in 'big-sky' country. Its landscape has influenced artists as diverse as Jack B. Yeats, Graham Greene, Heinrich Boll, John Ford and Michael Viney as well as its own indigenous writers such as novelists from George Birmingham to Sally Rooney and poets from FR Higgins to Paul Durcan.

People

The people of Mayo are renowned for their warmth and welcome, willingness to help each other, worldwide networks, strong sense of local identity and roots and of course passionate support of their sporting heroes. Music, storytelling and song are shared and celebrated in a myriad of places and on

social media. Mayo people still 'go visiting' and share food, music, stories and their time. The Meitheal system thrives in the county with neighbours and communities supporting each other, particularly during challenging times.

Mayo has a strong tradition of folklore and storytelling. This is part of an oral tradition that extends to the battle of Moytura (between the Fir Bolg and the Tuatha Dé Danann) and the story of the Children of Lir who spent their last 300 years in Erris before flying to Inishglora where they are said to be buried. Inward migration of new communities to Mayo has enriched this cultural terrain immensely, bringing new stories, experiences, music, beliefs and skills whether it be from Britain, Burma, Syria or Ukraine.

The culture of Mayo has been enormously influenced by religion and is still much in evidence today in the crowds that throng to Knock shrine, the pilgrims (and athletes!) who daily climb Croagh Patrick and visitors to Ballintubber Abbey. The county boasts a rich stained-glass heritage – fine examples of the works of Harry Clarke and Wilhelmina Geedes can be found in churches around Mayo. The Irish language is also central to Mayo's culture. Until the late 19th century it was the spoken language of the great majority and today around ten per cent of the people still live in the Gaeltacht.

Where Creativity happens

Creativity flourishes in Mayo: in arts centres, libraries, digital hubs, museums, community halls and in festivals. It also blossoms in other places: community care nursing homes, on Greenways, on the top of Croagh Patrick, on islands, at surf schools, in Ballycroy National Park and in a Rural Training Centre. For example, over 40 organisations and venues participated in Culture Night 2022 when events took place in arts centres, cultural centres, museums, galleries, shops, pubs, artists' studios, community halls, Family Resource Centres,

libraries, cafés, bookshops and historical houses. Events were hosted by Comhaltas branches, town bands, cycle tours and astronomy clubs. This diversity and complexity demonstrate the enthusiastic 'making our own of it' that flourishes in the county. Similarly for Heritage Week 2022 over 100 events were held ranging from talks on place names and folklore, to herb and floral demonstrations in walled gardens, to midnight meetings in Mayo Dark Sky Park. On a much larger scale the Creative Ireland funded Other Voices festival attracted thousands of people to the streets of Ballina in 2019.

Mayo's three Gaeltacht areas, Erris, Achill and Tourmakedy, harbour, sustain and promote Irish language and culture. Knock is internationally recognised as a place of prayer and pilgrimage. Ballycroy National Park has been granted Gold-Tier International Dark Sky Park Status. Wild Nephin is the first national wilderness park in Ireland comprising 11,000 hectares of land owned by Coillte and the National Parks and Wildlife Service. Mayo is also home to Ireland's first greenway - the Great Western Greenway, running 43.5 kilometres from Westport to Achill, with plans for extension to Louisburgh. Another part of the Greenway runs from Lough Lannagh in Castlebar to the National Museum of Country Life at Turlough. And all are places where culture and creativity happen in Mayo.

Spaces for Culture

Mayo County Council has invested extensively in spaces for culture. There are:

- 14 libraries in the county,
- a network of 20 museums and heritage centres including the flagship National Museum of Country Life at Turlough, Ballintubber Abbey, Ballycroy National Park, The Michael Davitt Museum, Foxford Woolen Mills, Knock Folk Museum, the Jackie Clarke Collection in Ballina which holds over 100,000 items covering 400 years of Irish history
- 10 arts venues (6 multi-purpose, 1 artists' studios/ gallery, 2 artists' residencies and 1 community-based)

Festivals, as well as being an important component of the tourism industry in Mayo are also a means of celebrating heritage, culture and creativity. They are often an annual meeting point for visitors, locals and the great Mayo diaspora. Mayo boasts numerous such events, which are opportunities to showcase its unique culture and heritage, and celebrations of its people and places both urban and rural. They include traditional music and song festivals, street festivals, writing festivals and, especially important in Mayo, connecting with our diaspora. Initiatives such as Heritage Week, Bealtaine, Culture Night, Mayo Day, The Wild Atlantic Words festival, The Rolling Sun Book Festival and the Children's Book Festival are key events that showcase all that is good in the creative and cultural sector in Mayo throughout the year. The national *Cruinniú na nÓg* festival which creatively combines heritage, arts, environment, wellbeing and fun, highlights the extended possibilities which the Creative Ireland Programme provides.

Cultural & Creative Sector

There is a growing and thriving cultural & creative sector in County Mayo, with over 600 people working in the area including: visual artists/ musicians/ dancers/ photographers/ theatre practitioners/ architects/ graphic designers/ game designers/ film-makers/ arts administrators & curators/ sound & broadcasting/ digital media companies. Pivotal to the vibrant cultural sector in Mayo are the many artists and creatives of all disciplines, who live and work in the county. They are complemented by the broad range of people who drive professional cultural organisations, events, festivals, amateur arts groups and community groups who engage with culture. This amounts to an enviable resource of talent, know-how, commitment and experience within the county.

Partnership for Inclusion

Mayo County Council works effectively through a comprehensive system of external relationships and partnerships, underpinned by strong inter-departmental collaboration throughout the Council: Childcare, Community, Arts, Library,



Children's Book Festival at Mayo Library. **Photograph:** Alison Laredo

Heritage, Architects, Sport, Environment, Irish Language, Tourism, Enterprise & Investment, Council Area Offices and Municipal Districts all working together for the public good. Through our extensive library, community, museums and arts infrastructure, we endeavour to reach all members of our communities. Some examples of collaborative partnerships leading to excellence are Music Generation Mayo (including the creation of a County Instrument Bank), Mayo Artsquad, Mayo Ideas Week, Mayo Men on the Move Programme, Heritage Week, Science Week and Children's Book Festival Month. The Creative Ireland Programme has strengthened and enhanced these partnerships.

Community involvement

The central importance of community cannot be overstated, particularly in relation to heritage management, cultural inclusion and ownership and participation in events and festivals. Without such enthusiastic citizenship, the cultural landscape could not exist or thrive. Attendance at civic events is huge: from marathons to music festivals, from pollinator workshops to street theatre, from library readings to bat walks, from sean-nós dancing to dark sky events, the public's love of culture and creativity and demand for quality is constant.

Diaspora

Mayo people have deep connections with the Mayo family worldwide. The experience of departure and return is still a reality in the county but social media has lessened the distance in terms of communication. A number of people from the county have achieved positions of great influence and achievement nationally and internationally: Mary Robinson, Admiral William Browne, Michael Davitt, Sally Rooney and the legendary Grainuaile, Pirate Queen. Today there are numerous Mayo Associations throughout the world, strongly connected to 'home', keen to share and exchange cultural experiences. The importance of the Mayo diaspora was highlighted in the hugely successful Creative Ireland funded Home to Mayo festival held in 2022.

Creative Ireland in Mayo 2018 to 2022

In the first five years of its existence, the Creative Ireland programme has succeeded in its main objective of broadening creative engagement in Mayo. It has increased participation in arts and culture, led to an expansion in the number of artistic and heritage programmes, has helped bed-in and enlarge pre-existing festivals and initiatives and has made progress in enhancing the strategic role of culture and engagement within the local authority. Over the five-year period, the programme has supported almost 80 initiatives providing half a million euro to approximately 300 creative individuals

Pre-existing initiatives that have grown in size and scale due to Creative Ireland support include: Heritage Day in Ballina; Westival in Westport; The Wild Atlantic Way Book Festival; Mayo Day; Culture Night; The Rolling Sun Book Festival; Children's Book Festival in Mayo Libraries and a Writer-in-Residence programme. All of these are now firmly established in the Mayo cultural calendar.

New initiatives that would not have happened without the Creative Ireland Programme include bringing Other Voices to Ballina in 2019 and 2020; the Home to Mayo festival in May 2022; and the support provided to artist Niamh O'Malley to represent Ireland at the Venice Art Biennale.

The programme has also led to the creation of completely new partnerships which have produced novel creative initiatives such as a social prescribing programme, developed in partnership between Creative Ireland and Healthy Communities Pilot Programme. Two other projects - Where Art and Science Meet: Plastic Pollution & Micro Plastics project and a philosophical workshop Thinking with Hands. A Swift Conservation Project - brought about a new partnership between Mayo Heritage Office, Mayo Environment Office, Swift Conservation Mayo, GMIT and local communities and organisations. Onsite, a partnership between Mayo Arts Service, the National Museum of Ireland Country Life and Mayo Artsquad, provides opportunities for creative responses to the National Folklife Collection.

In the area of heritage, new initiatives include a biodiversity and sustainability campus at MacHale Park, Castlebar; willow sculptures in Straide; a map restoration project; a food history of Mayo islands; restoration of historic ironworks in graveyards; a major heritage conference in Cong; scanning of historic photographs and numerous publications.

The annual *Cruinniú na nÓg* festival has resulted in events being held in small rural communities that would never have happened in the past. Children have taken part in art, music, astronomy, coding, circus skills and numerous other creative workshops as a result of this programme. It has also supported individual or small-time creatives who would not have had the resources to work otherwise. The huge Cruinniú at the Barracks in 2017 showed the potential of this day to become a flagship event involving numerous artist and creatives and attracting hundreds of participants.

Film is an area that the Mayo Creative Ireland Programme has particularly focussed on. The programme has supported Film Mayo in promoting and fostering film making in the county. The creation of a film residency in 2018 was an important part of this programme. In 2021, the county was a location for a number of productions including 'My Sailor, My Love' directed by Klaus Härö and co-produced by Samson Films and 'The Banshees of Inisherin' directed by Martin McDonagh and starring Brendan Gleeson, Colin Farrell and Barry Keoghan. Both productions were shot on location on Achill.

The initiative has additionally been strategic in fostering new talent through initiatives such as an ongoing Artists Continuing Development programme where Mayo artists get an opportunity to learn from national and international experts while also having opportunities to meet colleagues from different disciplines and create new partnerships and potentially new creative initiatives.

Inclusivity and support for diversity have been important principles in Mayo's Creative Ireland Programme. This is evidenced in outcomes such as our Inclusive Youth visual art projects; our Music in Care Homes programme; our dementia-inclusive tours and our Arts and Disability residency. Our Luisne Arts Project is a partnership with Mayo Arts

Service, Western Care and Tacú Family Resource Centre providing long-term arts project for people with disabilities to engage with their creativity and community. One of our programmes, Crown, a project on Traveller hair and identity, achieved national recognition and has created ongoing artistic partnerships with the Traveller community.

The Libraries, Arts and Heritage Services in Mayo are inclusive and non-elitist in their ethos and are underpinned by the principle of social inclusion. They have successfully incentivised sharing of resources between venues, communities, between sectors and across disciplines. Some excellent examples include their Musical Instrument lending programme; their Healthy Ireland at Your Library programme and their artist's residency at the Jackie Clarke Collection.

A lot of the success of the Mayo Creative Ireland Programme has been due to the creation of a team crossing numerous disciplines ranging from arts and heritage to libraries and tourism to economic development. Over the five years a number of issues have emerged which will be advanced in the current strategy. There will be a need to focus more on creativity as a driver for the creative industries in this five-year strategy but the success of Film Mayo shows that Creative Ireland Mayo is on the right track. There will also be a huge emphasis on supporting creativity from the early years in this programme perhaps through working more with Creative Schools in trying to place creative thinking at the heart of what children do. There will also be more of an emphasis on 'local' projects, determined by local people and in local places. And finally, and most importantly, the aim will be to support projects that contribute to the cultural legacy of County Mayo.

Looking forward

Our creative future is integral to the development of Mayo. The opportunities created through Creative Ireland have allowed us to further expand this. We are well placed for ongoing productive cooperation between our council services, the creative sector, communities, partnership organisations and the wider public. We welcome the challenges inherent in the next 5 years and look forward to harnessing



Sally Rooney and friends attending the Wild Atlantic Words festival in Castlebar. **Photograph:** John Mee

the best of what our county has to offer. The Mayo Culture and Creativity Teamworking strategically with the creative sector believe that this strategy will be a vital component in creating a vibrant creative country. We believe that Creative Ireland will continue to provide additional resources towards the recognition and celebration of our vibrant creative sector in Mayo. We will continue to offer supports for inspiration, imagination and creativity. We will continue to promote engagement with these to the benefit of artists, local communities and the wider public. We look forward to delivering our vision for a truly creative and inclusive society working alongside the Creative Ireland Programme. to the individual elements, promoted by a unified communicative voice.

3

The Creative Ireland Vision for Mayo

The vision of Creative Ireland is that every person living in Ireland will have the opportunity to fully realise his or her creative potential. The vision is pursued through the Five-Pillars of the Creative Ireland Programme:

1. Enabling the Creative Potential of Every Child
2. Enabling Creativity in Every Community
3. Investing in our Creative and Cultural Infrastructure
4. The Creative Industries: Ireland as a Centre of Excellence in Media Production
5. Unifying our Global Reputation

Participation and access are central to the vision. Connecting artists and other creators to communities is also regarded as essential to realising the vision.

Mayo County Council recognises that culture is a multifaceted area that is continuously evolving and combining in a complex manner. Mayo County Council values and promotes creativity and artistic and cultural production as it does cultural heritage. We recognise that cultural vibrancy is an important component of social and economic sustainability, but more importantly, that it also drives innovation. We understand that experiencing culture, in its many facets, helps improve the quality of life of our citizens and contributes to the wellbeing of individuals and communities. The Creative Ireland values complement the council's vision of

"A County that is Sustainable, Inclusive, Prosperous and Proud".

Mayo County Council will continue to position culture, heritage and creativity centrally within its corporate policies, recognising the role they have in all aspects of the county's life: from community

to tourism, from the economy to education, and from quality of life to public engagement. They are central to human development and are central to Mayo's relationship with Ireland and the world. They are what link us to our diaspora and we will aim to continue to work with the world-wide Mayo family under this strategy. They build community, empower people and help develop the economy by enabling change through imagination and creativity. We look forward to opening doors for our artists, historians, poets, musicians, architects, designers, scientists, scholars, children and all of our communities so that the richness of our heritage and our culture, in all its diversity, will be a cogent reminder of our past, essential to our present and a signpost to our future.

Mayo County Council will increase investment in culture and creativity over the five years of this strategy, and will support and promote opportunities for everyone to participate in the county's cultural life. This plan sets out a five-

year journey which will emphasise participation, empowering creative potential, investing in our creative infrastructure and in the creative industries. Quality of life and cultural experience at a local level are key priorities of the council as highlighted in our corporate plan which has as its mission statement:

"to promote the well-being and quality of life of our citizens and communities in Mayo and to enhance the attractiveness of the County as a place in which to live, work, visit, invest in and enjoy".

In implementing this plan, Mayo County Council values the potential of creativity, culture and heritage to have positive impacts for personal and collective well-being, including mental health. We also recognize the importance of culture and creativity in advancing our other agendas such as

dealing with climate change. In working with local groups and organisations, we will endeavour to make culture as accessible as possible, to people of all ages, abilities and disabilities. For instance, our library service aims to empower communities by providing access to resources that educate, inform and enrich the lives of citizens, by promoting and supporting literature and a love of reading. The focus on reading and literacy in this strategy highlights our emphasis on enabling the creative potential of every child. Our commitment to the creative and cultural infrastructure is shown in our commitment to transforming Castlebar Military Barracks into a multi-disciplinary creative hub. This will provide space for families and community making, creative industries, creative education and will foster engagement in all kinds of creative production, situated in an extraordinary heritage asset, right in the heart of Castlebar.



Great Western Greenway, Co. Mayo -Tourism Department, Mayo County Council

4

How The Creative Ireland Programme Works

Principles and Values of Creative Communities

Creative Communities will continue to support local authorities as a wellbeing strategy through:

- **Policy** — Working in partnership across government supporting local authorities to deliver relevant local, regional, and national policies and priorities;
- **Practice** — Flexible, cross-cutting Culture and Creativity Teams providing an agile and adaptable approach central to the delivery of *Creative Communities* as it addresses locally-relevant priorities;
- **Participation** — Providing more opportunities for people to engage with and enjoy culture and creativity at local level in ways that underpin equality of access; and
- **Partnership** — Between central and local government, and Mayo County Council and our local culture and creative sectors.

This approach is based on addressing a shared, strategic agenda while delivering on the challenges and opportunities unique to each local authority area.

The *Creative Communities* partnership will be delivered in line with the following principles and values:

- i. Broaden access to, and participation in, cultural and creative activities locally.
- ii. Use culture and creativity as a catalyst for collaboration and innovation in achieving greater wellbeing, social cohesion, and economic development.
- iii. Strengthen the capacity of local authorities to integrate culture and creativity across place-making, regeneration, renewal, and the development of more vibrant, creative, and sustainable places.
- iv. Investing in culture and creativity to support environmental, social, and economic returns that help deliver local authority agendas — from local and regional, to national and international.
- v. Build on the agility and integrated approach of Culture and Creativity Teams to sustain further delivery of targeted collaborative programmes.

Mayo County Council has fully embraced the aims and ambitions of the Creative Ireland Programme. Its values of Collaboration, Communication, Community, Participation, Inclusivity and Empowerment are also our values. Mayo County Council is committed to leading, developing and working in partnership to create and support opportunities for all citizens to engage in inclusive and diverse cultural experiences. We work on the principle of partnership and genuine inclusion, both internally and externally. Music Generation Mayo is a good example of how this works in practice.



Wild Nephin National Park Visitors Centre, Ballycroy Co Mayo- Tourism Department, Mayo County Council

Through partnership with Mayo Sligo Leitrim Education & Training Board, Mayo Education Centre, Mayo County Community Forum, LEADER, Mayo Arts Service and Mayo Library Service, a ground-breaking county-wide instrument bank has been delivered for the use of every child no matter where they live – the first of its kind in Ireland.

This strategy is an all-authority plan that aims to identify and implement actions that will support and promote creative and cultural activity across the county. It has been informed by community consultations carried out by the Culture and Creativity Team and Mayo County Council jointly and by collaboration across departments of the council. The team embraces staff working across a number of areas including arts, libraries, heritage, museums, archives, archaeology, community and social inclusion, architecture, tourism, Irish

language, and local enterprise. It is envisaged that climate action will be added to this under the new strategy. The implementation of this strategy will see the Council work with all the key stakeholders to sustain and grow cultural provision within the county for the benefit of all. The strategy will focus on broadening and deepening opportunities for everyone to engage with culture and creativity in order to enhance individual and collective wellbeing throughout Mayo. Together we will develop inclusive programmes that provide opportunities for people of all ages and backgrounds to develop their creativity and enhance their wellbeing through engaging in culture and arts in the broadest sense.

Building on the success of our 2017 Creative Ireland Action Plan our aim is to shape a creative and vibrant county which is attractive, inclusive and accessible for all.

5 The Strategic Priorities for Mayo

The focus of this strategy is to continue to mainstream creativity in our communities. By the end of the five-year period, we envision that everyone living in Mayo will have the opportunity to express themselves according to their needs and abilities.

The aim will be to expand the engagement by citizens of Mayo with culture, thus nurturing creativity and imagination which were fostered in the previous strategy. The priorities of the strategy dovetail with the objectives and actions articulated in the County Development Plan, the Local Economic & Community Plan and individual plans for the Arts, Libraries, Tourism, Heritage and the Irish language.

Our focus is on putting culture at the heart of our citizens' lives, fostering creativity and celebrating our cultural heritage and traditions. Be bold and be different will be our motto. We have identified six strategic objectives to achieve our aims:

Strategic Priority 1: Enabling Creativity in Every Community

A key aim of this strategy is to empower and build capacity and support participation in creative initiatives. The development of strategic systems to enhance the arts, heritage and creative sectors both within the county and further afield, will be a major part of the work of the Mayo Culture and Creativity Team over the period of this strategy. Ensuring that the public are aware of and participate in events, festivals, initiatives, projects and programmes is essential for success and sustainability. The aim of the strategy is for the excellent work that happened in the first 5-year strategy be expanded widely so that Mayo may be justifiably recognized as a creative hub in the west.

Through continuing strategic partnerships and programming for culture and heritage facilities, Creative Ireland Mayo will seek to 'join the dots' and add value.

Strategic Objectives:

- Develop large scale, ambitious integrated projects showcasing cutting edge practise in culture and heritage.
- Increase opportunities for artists and creatives working in new technologies to work in Mayo.
- Invest in and promote libraries, arts centres, heritage centres, family resource centres and community centres as key cultural and creativity hubs.
- Promote creativity, culture and the Irish language as means of town revitalisation and invigorating the rural economy.
- Facilitate pivotal interdisciplinary exchanges through collaboration and partnership, maximising opportunities for artists and makers across all disciplines
- Provide opportunities for residency programmes, tailored to local interest (in heritage/ film-making/ creative writing/ music/ visual art/ drama/ dance/ traditional arts/ Irish language arts/ coding/ robotics/ craft etc), ensuring that there are broad opportunities to participate and show-case.
- Ensure all Creative Ireland supported projects and initiatives reflect the diversity of our communities.
- Promote the Jackie Clarke Collection as "Ireland's Memory" and develop it as the most important collection of Irish history material outside of Dublin, thus making it a magnet for researchers and tourists in the North Mayo area.

- Support the development of The Mary Robinson Centre in Ballina as a major tourist and research centre.

Strategic Priority 2: Enabling the Creative Potential of every child in Mayo

Creativity is about a process of having original ideas, of problem-solving, of exploring new ways of doing things, of investigating unfamiliar areas and of thinking outside the box. Open-ended creative activities stimulate and help children cultivate these abilities across virtually every domain, fostering self-esteem, confidence and innovation.

Several excellent initiatives already exist in the county which encourage early years creativity: *Roola Boola Children's Arts Festival* at the Linenhall Arts Centre's; Mayo Library's month-long annual Children's Book Festival; *Cruinniú Festival of Creativity* in June; *Sound Worlds Early Years Music Programme* (a partnership between Mayo County Childcare Committee and Music Generation); the library's *Summer Stars* reading programme and *A Splash of Blue*, a Schools Exhibition programme curated by Mayo Arts Office.

Creative Ireland Mayo will seek to support and expand the reach of this work.

Strategic Objectives:

1. Increase the level of access and engagement with culture and creativity for young children through existing networks, organisations and infrastructure: schools, play schools, libraries, mother & toddler groups, parents associations etc.
2. Ensure, through partnership and strategic supports, that a variety of creative opportunities are available during early years.
3. Involve local communities to expand the reach and impact of all initiatives.
4. Introduce as many early years' children as possible to the joy of reading and writing.
5. Mayo Library will enhance its focus on early

years creativity during the period of the strategy through programmes such as the Summer Stars reading initiative, story hours, author visits, the provision of book bags etc.

Strategic Priority 3: Creative engagement for teenagers and young people.

The teenage years are a time of enormous personal development and change. Being involved in creative activity, from performing arts (film-making, dance, music, drama) to more solitary activities (creative writing, visual arts, new media) can benefit teenagers hugely. One of the most important aspects of creative activity is that it can help to develop a sense of personal identity: expressing one's own voice, thoughts and feelings. Creative activity, outside of mainstream education, is particularly important for teenagers. It is one of the ways they can develop new interests, experiences and self-expression in a safe environment. Research has listed the positives of engaging in youth arts programmes as: developing new interests and experiences, a sense of purpose, meeting new people, seeing the world differently, empowerment, sense of achievement, sense of belonging, learning to work in a group and learning new skills such as acting, playing music, dancing, film-making, writing etc.

Many who engage with youth arts programmes go on to work professionally in the creative arts and creative industries, as directors, writers, choreographers, technical staff, administrators, journalists, musicians etc.

Several initiatives already exist in the county which encourage creativity in this demographic:

- **Youth Theatre in Mayo** is a partnership between Mayo Arts Service and local groups and organisations.
- **EXCEL** is Mayo County Council's Youth Arts programme that provides an opportunity for young people to explore their creativity, gain skills in various art forms and encounter practicing artists.

- **The Core** is a contemporary music making space for young people aged 12-18, housed in the Ballina Arts Centre in Ballina where young people can explore music technology and song writing as well as providing a live performance venue for their music.
- **Music Generation Mayo Harp Ensemble** is a large harp “orchestra” meeting fortnightly for Saturday afternoon rehearsals under the direction of two professional harpists, where music is learned by ear, so music reading is not required.
- **Mayo Youth Orchestra** provides regular tuition and performance opportunities for young musicians around Mayo.

Through strategic engagement with youth organisations (Comhairle na nÓg, Foróige, No-Name clubs, Creative Youth Partnership, Youth Officers in relevant organisations), existing arts infrastructure and organisations (Music Generation Mayo, Mayo Youth Theatre, EXCEL Youth Arts Programme, Youth Choirs, Fighting Words at Mayo Library) Creative Ireland Mayo aims to add value and provide exceptional opportunities for young people to explore and develop their individual and unique creative voices.

Strategic Objectives:

- Encourage better access through clustering and sharing of resources and expertise
- Extend access to creative engagement of all kinds at community and local level through Libraries, Arts, Heritage and Community venues
- Develop a marketing and communications strategy specifically for engaging with young people.
- Support relevant annual programmes such as EXCEL Youth Arts Programme, Mayo Youth Theatre, Youth Choirs and Mayo Library’s Fighting Words programme which provide specialist creative engagement opportunities for young people

Strategic Priority 4: Promote democratisation of culture through heritage, arts and cultural organisations working with communities

This priority specifically focuses on community creativity. The aim is to promote participation, and this will be done through an emphasis on the creation of opportunities to show-case, celebrate and experience community-lead creativity. This includes craft groups, amateur drama, community choirs, local heritage groups, painting groups etc.

Strategic Objectives:

1. Encourage the provision of space and opportunities for local arts and heritage groups to show-case their work through community centres, local libraries, cultural centres and festivals.
2. Encourage sharing of knowledge and skills between local arts, crafts and heritage groups and between generations.
3. Bring the best to Mayo. Invite national and international experts and specialists in all areas of creativity to the county.
4. Pilot ‘Creative Ireland Days’, where local and voluntary groups get an opportunity to set up (public) events in arts venues, libraries, museums and community buildings.
5. Continue to ensure that key target groups are provided for within Mayo, including older people, people with disabilities, intercultural groups, the Gaeltacht community and marginalized groups.
6. As far as possible, involve communities and the voluntary sector in specific developmental initiatives.
7. Reach out to the worldwide Mayo diaspora in innovative ways through our cultural and heritage resources – for example our libraries and family history centres will work together to use our genealogy resources to attract tourism. Many of the treasure of Mayo’s history hidden in the libraries of the county (newspapers, photos, maps, diaries etc) will be digitised to create unique cultural artefacts.



Races of Castlebar, 1798
recreation – Tourism Department,
Mayo County Council

8. Connect with Language Planning Officers in our Gaeltacht communities to promote Irish-language based arts including drama, sean-nós singing, storytelling and traditional oral art forms.
9. Develop Mayo Day as a Flagship Visitor festival for the county.
10. Promote active participation in Heritage Week, Culture Night and other national programmes with particular focus on “newcomers” and non-traditional audiences.
11. Promote creative approaches to conserving and engaging with cultural and natural heritage to assist conservation.

Strategic Priority 5: Value and support artists, crafters and other creatives

The artists, craftspeople, designers and makers who live and work in Mayo are pivotal to the creative sector in the county. Conservatively estimated to be over 600 people, they underpin the creative economy within the county. In addition to their own practice, many work in schools, in care settings, in libraries and with diverse communities, sharing their skills and expertise. They provide beautiful exhibitions, wonderful recitals, transformative ideas and constructions, adding colour, imagination and vitality to the life of the county.

Strategic Objectives:

- As Mayo is a large county with a dispersed population, it is often difficult for creatives to meet others of their own community. Through existing and new infrastructure provide opportunities for creatives to meet, network and skill-share.
- In partnership with professional organisations and key agencies, provide spaces to show-case work of the wider creative sector in Mayo, both within the county and nationally.
- Communicate the value of our artists and creatives by connecting them to communities and by offering them opportunities for work through the Creative Ireland Programme.

- Develop a database of Mayo artists, crafters and creatives of all disciplines, to promote the large number of professional artists in the county and provide a platform for them to share their information /portfolios etc
- Provide capacity building opportunities for creative practitioners, with a focus on interdisciplinary and collaborative project development

Strategic Priority 6: Develop creative industry in Mayo through encouraging participation and innovation

In a county with a thriving artistic population, where heritage is respected and celebrated, there are huge opportunities for developing the creative sector. The creation of spaces for inter-disciplinary co-operation between artists, tourism and heritage sectors and broader industry will lead to enhanced Creative and Cultural Industries (CCI's) and strengthen cultural tourism in the county. In Mayo, there are already initiatives which place creativity at the heart of developing resourceful and entrepreneurial skills to equip young people to deal flexibly with future economic challenges. The aim of this strategic priority will be to maximise these skills in Mayo.

Strategic Objectives:

1. Augment Mayo's identity as a creative county by developing spaces for young people to explore their creativity in enjoyable and engaging ways.
2. Explore the feasibility of creating a multi-disciplinary creative hub at the Military Barracks in Castlebar.
3. Promote innovation, new ideas and the celebration of individual and collective creativity through existing events such as Science Week and Mayo Ideas Week.
4. Investigate and promote the role of creativity in local economic development whether it be the provision of libraries and bookshops in town centres or the creation of digital hubs in unused buildings

5. Provide opportunities for young people to engage with ideas generation, creative thinking and problem solving through creative workshops and challenges.
6. Work with counties in the region (and also the Western Development Commission and Údarás na Gaeltachta) to maximise investment in creativity.
7. Support the film sector through working with Mayo Arts Service, seeking to maximise uptake of the Western Region Audiovisual Producer's Fund (WRAP). Support advocacy for a full-time Film Officer to maximise the potential of this sector in County Mayo.
8. Develop links between creatives and relevant local businesses – this might include sponsorship, provision of accommodation and ultimately the development of innovative local products.
9. Promote the use of traditional skills in the conservation of historic buildings and structures and showcase best practice.

Strategic Priority 7: Promote the green agenda and action on climate change

- Investigate and promote the potential and pivotal role creativity can play in addressing the challenges presented by climate action
- Work with relevant partners to develop and deliver initiatives that bridge the gap between awareness and action in terms of facing the climate emergency.
- Support artists and communities throughout Mayo to collaborate on projects that demonstrate how Mayo can benefit from a low carbon and climate resilient future.
- Support opportunities for collaborative projects and programmes with the Wild Nephin National Park in Ballycroy.

6 Implementation by the Mayo Culture and Creativity Team

Mayo has a Culture and Creativity Team in place to guide and oversee implementation of this Strategy.

The Culture and Creativity Teams are the cornerstone of Creative Communities across all thirty-one local authorities in Ireland. These teams bring together a significant range and level of expertise. In many cases, include professionals from architecture, archives, the arts, climate action, community, enterprise and environmental development, heritage, information and communication technologies, Irish language, libraries, spatial planning, tourism and more. This depth of technical expertise affords each local authority a level of insight, resources, and delivery experience which few other public or private sector organisations can match.

The role of this team is to:

- Provide a collective forum for the ambition of culture and creativity within the local authority;
- Focus on diversity and inclusivity and enable harder to reach communities to participate in cultural and creative activities;
- Build on existing in-house expertise and strategies across areas of wellbeing, social cohesion, and economic development to leverage culture and creativity to deliver on targeted local authority agendas;
- Enable a shift in how the cultural and creative sector is valued within and across local authorities and ensure that culture and creativity is embedded across local authority plans, policies, and project teams;

- Drive cross-collaborative actions that support change and positive outcomes locally, and potentially between local authorities at regional level;
- Be innovative and take risks – try new projects and new ways of working.

The delivery of the Strategy is led by the Director of Services and the members of the Culture and Creativity Team for Mayo:


The County Librarian is the Creative Ireland Co-Ordinator, the Arts Officer, the Head of Communications, the Heritage Officer, the Tourism Officer, the Manager of the Jackie Clarke Museum.


Map of Mayo



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