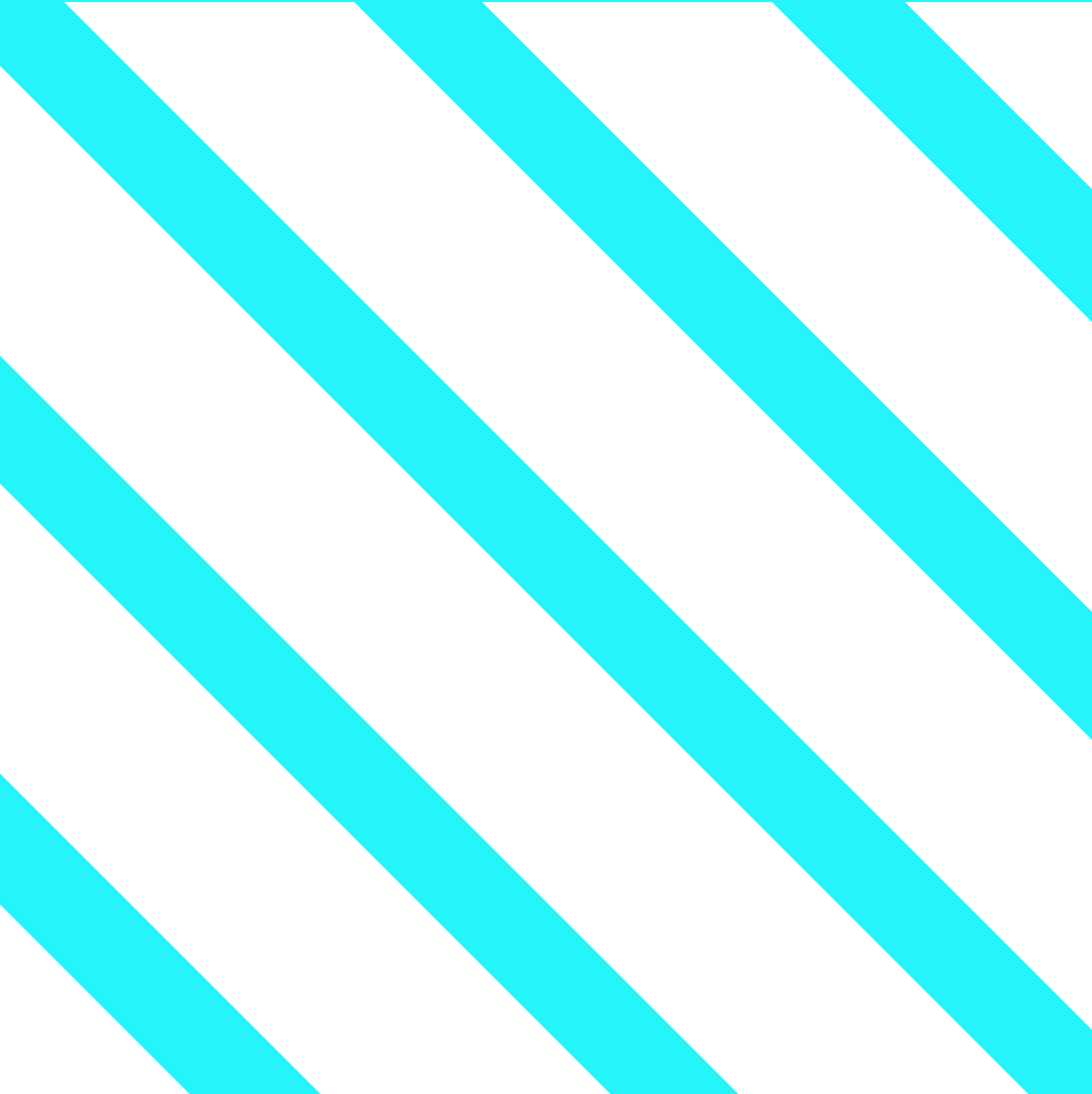


**DUBLIN**  
**FRINGE**  
**FESTIVAL**

**STRATEGY 2022 - 2026**

# FOREWORD



Change today is unavoidable. Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, political disruption and digital advances had begun to rapidly transform the way we live, work, and engage with each other, and how we make, create, present, and consume culture.

Dublin Fringe Festival understands that culture precedes change. Any real societal step forward that results in substantial change has come about as the result of a cultural shift, a collective motion that engages the public's imagination—something that builds an energy and movement that cannot be altered or denied. Each year, Dublin Fringe Festival has a call to action, a call to arms of sorts. As we approach our third decade, what we represent, and what we aim at all times to be, is a platform for artistic expression and an agent of positive change.

Dublin Fringe Festival puts into practice the knowledge that a thriving shared local and national culture is about the everyday, while simultaneously developing the capacity to imagine our world as otherwise. It is about knowing there must be another or a better way—it is about being a different kind of *different*. Culture is essential to place. Our festival is in and of the city, but we are more than that. Dublin Fringe Festival and the artists we work with are not on the edge, we are cutting edge. We resist the hierarchy of majority and popularity. We are not mainstream nor are we on the margins. We reflect the alternate. We are proudly dogged about representing the richness and diversity of contemporary Irish society in all its glory.

Dublin Fringe Festival is a vital part of the arts ecology on the island of Ireland. To comprehend the role it plays in the sector, it's important to understand it as a 'complex system'. Dublin Fringe Festival supports over 4,000 artists through a yearlong programme of activity. Building skills and community, we offer space, advice, mentoring, experiences, and gatherings to artists. Dublin Fringe Festival commissions and co-commissions artists to create and present as part of the festival, while also presenting over 70 productions of national and international artists. We offer workshops, training, production supports and artistic guidance to all presenting artists. Dublin Fringe Festival excels in offering tailored opportunities to artists of varying experience, tackling barriers to access, building connectivity, and cross-pollinating audiences. Each year, the festival partners with over 38 venues, spaces, businesses, and funders. Dublin Fringe Festival represents not just levelling up, but levelling around and across, designing and delivering year-round supports and platforms aimed at affording artists the opportunity to address inequalities.

Dublin Fringe Festival is an approach and a mindset. An approach of experimenting and innovating, seeing possibilities, harnessing expertise and knowledge, reaching out to others, building alliances, and focusing on big collective ideals. A mindset characterised by a spirit of kindness, solidarity, patience and understanding, combined with innovative, agile, and adaptive problem solving.

The writing of this strategic plan is a clear acknowledgement that to remain current and

relevant many aspects of our work must adjust, alter, and improve. We know there is always room for improvement. This strategic plan evidences and confirms our commitment to test and question ourselves, and to challenge ourselves to be ambitious thought leaders.

The past five years have been full of pain. Waking the Feminists, the Me Too Movement and Speak Up, international political unrest, an ongoing global pandemic, and war in Europe. It has felt so unhappy and unsettling, and what remains is an overall feeling of global not-rightness. Martin Luther King once said, *'We must accept finite disappointment but never lose infinite hope.'* We do have things to be grateful and hopeful for: the Basic Income for Artists pilot, and the inspirational resilience of artists and our community. Everything is not OK, and things are not easy, but they have to—they will—get better.

Dublin Fringe Festival's ability to succeed depends on multiple strategic partners to whom we are very grateful. We are also reliant on and thankful for our strategic funding partners and sponsors. These relationships are based on trust, compatibility, and shared values. Dublin Fringe Festival is hugely fortunate to have a stellar highly skilled team who demonstrate immense leadership and boundless dedication. They in turn are supported by a dynamic and committed Board of Directors. Our work is not possible without all of them.

**MOST IMPORTANTLY OF ALL, I –WE– ARE IMMENSELY GRATEFUL TO THE ARTISTS, ACTIVISTS, MAKERS, CREATIVES, TECHNICAL AND STAGE ARTISTS, AND OUR WONDERFUL AUDIENCES. WILLIAM JAMES, PHILOSOPHER AND PSYCHOLOGIST SAID: 'ACT AS IF WHAT YOU DO MAKES A DIFFERENCE. IT DOES.' THEIR WORK, BRAVERY, TALENT AND RESILIENCE ARE OUR CORE PURPOSE AND OUR INSPIRATION. THEY MAKE OUR WORK TRULY WORTHWHILE.**

**NIAMH O'DONNELL  
CHAIRPERSON**







*BLACK JAM* by  
Fried Plantains  
Collective

**Photo**  
Simon Lazewski  
2019

# INTRODUCTION

This strategy sets a course for Dublin Fringe Festival for the next five years.

As always at Dublin Fringe Festival, artists are our compass. We consulted with them as part of the process to develop this strategy, eager to hear their views about the festival and their priorities for its future. We also sought the opinion of our intrepid audiences and industry heroes at home and abroad as part of a programme of consultation. We relished the opportunity to hear the views of others, to review and reflect on what we do and how we do it. Their insights have directly shaped our thinking and emboldened our choices for the future.

In this moment, after years of shifting parameters and real-time challenges caused by the pandemic, the process to develop this strategy was a welcome opportunity to think long-term. It allows us to greet our renewing world with optimism and ambition – for artists, for Dublin and for the myriad cultural futures that unfurl at Dublin Fringe Festival.

From 2022 - 2026 we look forward to advancing our ambitions for the festival, for artists and artforms, and for audiences and to strengthening our capacity as an organisation to deliver on these ambitions. This defines where we will focus our efforts in the coming years and it will be in these four areas that we will measure our success.

This five-year strategy gives fresh expression to the DNA of Dublin Fringe Festival. It sets out our purpose: our reason for being. It shares our vision for the future which we will (always) be working towards. It affirms our mission, what we do to be true to both. It also presents our big ambitions for the immediate future.

Crucially, this strategy also sets out how we will work as a team and with others. A spirit of experimentation, fairness, joy and disruption will continue to infuse our work with our network of funding partners and collaborators and with the artists who inspire us. That same spirit will seed and cultivate the relationship we want to have with curious audiences. As we considered our values, five unassailable beliefs and attributes emerged, powerful and true.

## **START WITH THE ART. BE SOUND. CHANGE THINGS. FUN IS IMPORTANT. FAILURE IS FUEL.**

These certainties are our Dublin Fringe Fundamentals.

I am writing this in 2022. We have learned of late that we can be certain of few things about the future. But we do know beyond doubt that in 2026 there will still be undiscovered talent and counter-culture, throbbing dancefloors and ideas so crazy they just might work. We hope that by achieving the goals set out in this strategy, Dublin Fringe Festival will make sure that the artists and staff who turn those dreams into realities are doing so in an increasingly kind, resourced and sustainable context.

**LET'S GO.**

**RUTH MCGOWAN**  
**ARTISTIC DIRECTOR & CEO**



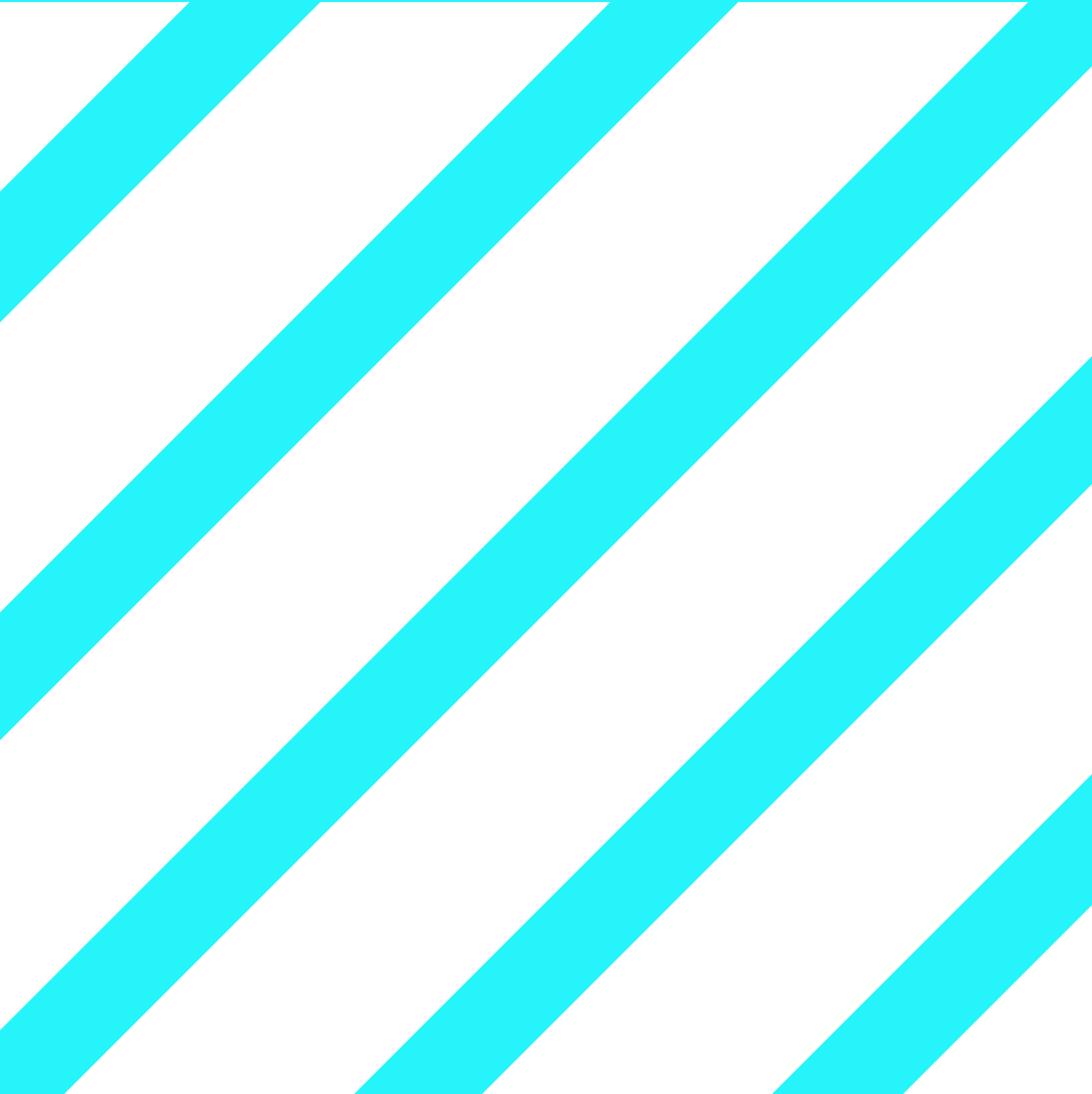




*The Lightkeepers  
Last Stand* by  
Looseysmokes

**Photo**  
Jenny Mulligan  
2018

# WHO WE ARE





Established in 1995, Dublin Fringe Festival is a curated, multidisciplinary festival and year-round organisation focusing on fresh and innovative approaches to the arts from Irish and international makers. It is the agenda-setting festival for new work in Ireland, devoted to talent development and artform development.

Dublin Fringe Festival is a platform for the best new, emerging Irish arts companies and a showcase for the finest Irish and international contemporary performing arts. The festival is where artists challenge, subvert and invigorate their disciplines and practice. For artists, Dublin Fringe Festival facilitates opportunities to innovate, to cross boundaries and strengthen the conditions in which they work.

Dublin Fringe Festival supports artistic vision, ambition and excellence across a range of art forms and offers supports, resources, space, time and professional development to the Irish independent arts sector. Our year-round FRINGE LAB resource centre provides thousands of artists with a vital platform where they can take risks, hone their skills and create artistic experiences that resonate with audiences.

For audiences, Dublin Fringe Festival is about discovery. The festival's programme inspires meaningful audience engagement and dialogue through exciting and unforgettable cultural experiences. We make space for artists in familiar civic spaces, delighting both accidental and deliberate spectators. The scale and environment of the festival broadens arts participation, playing a vital role in Dublin's cultural life and attracting loyal aficionados and newcomers to each edition.

Dublin Fringe Festival is supported by a skilled and dedicated staff and is governed by a voluntary Board of Directors who look forward to ushering the organisation into its next thirty years.

Dublin Fringe Festival is a company limited by guarantee not having a share capital and is also a registered charity.





**Photo**  
Simon Lazewski  
2016



# OUR PURPOSE

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To create an unmissable festival that champions artists, welcomes audiences, illuminates the now and discovers the next, blazing a trail towards a braver cultural future.

# OUR VISION

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Our vision is of a world that values artists as much as we do, where the possibilities of art are infinite, radical and for everyone.

# OUR AMBITION

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Our ambition is to be one of the world's most vital festivals where artistic risk is championed and audiences are enthralled and emboldened.

In pursuit of this ambition, specifically over the next five years:

- We will work to **make the festival unmissable**.
- We will sustain excellence and dynamism in our programming. We will amplify our brand within the calendar of the city and cultural conversation of the country: Fringe will own those 16 days in September. We will be visible and vibrant on the streets of Dublin, with a 'match day' feel and an increased festival footprint.
- We will work to **extend our influence for artists**.
- We will ensure that there is space in the city for artists to play. We will create space for innovative artforms to seed and thrive. We will identify and break down barriers to access for artists that defy the mainstream.
- We will hold up a **neon welcome sign for new audiences**.
- We will continue to create welcoming opportunities for new audiences to feel at home at Dublin Fringe Festival. We will meet potential audiences where they are and encourage them to be part of it, with continued commitment to accessible ticket pricing and free events.
- We will work to **ensure sustained impact**.
- We will seek to secure the resources necessary to advance our organisational capacity. We will do this to deliver on our ambitions and ensure continued, sustainable standards of rigor and excellence.

# OUR MISSION

- We seek out and present contemporary, playful and provocative new work made by Irish and international artists of vision in an annual celebration all over the city.
- We make a multidisciplinary festival that stimulates curiosity and creates memorable encounters that enthrall and embolden audiences.
- We create a framework for artistic risk, offering year-round support to artists across disciplines to challenge and invigorate their practice, and to extend the possibilities of what art can be.

# OUR VALUES

## JOY + DISRUPTION

Our work is a celebration of the beautiful, the experimental, the searching and the silly. We bring a sense of energy, play and possibility to all that we do. We have fun, and we want audiences to have fun too. We have a readiness to break the mould and dismantle existing systems in pursuit of equality of opportunity and freedom of expression for all.

## ORIGINALITY + MOMENTUM

Dublin Fringe leads by following artists, inventing in response to our annual open call. We prize innovation, ambition and new approaches. We run towards ideas that push boundaries and artists that defy the mainstream. We propel creative futures by supporting artists and their vision. We expand the possibilities of where and how art happens.

## INTEGRITY + LEGACY

We know that the experiences audiences and artists have at Dublin Fringe Festival can resonate for a lifetime. We work hard to do the right thing now, and for the future. We listen carefully, we discuss openly, we bring a generosity of spirit to every interaction. We create a safe framework for experimentation and artistic risk by ensuring stability and accountability in our working practices.

## FAIRNESS + TRANSFORMATION

We believe that art is for everyone. We work actively to remove barriers to access. We have an equity action plan which is at work in our organisation every day. We are playing our part in advancing a more fair and equal future for artists, audiences, volunteers and staff.





*Twenty Fifty* by Dan Colley, Fionnuala Gygax & Guests

**Photo**  
Simon Lazewski  
2020

# DUBLIN FRINGE FUNDAMENTALS

**START WITH THE ART.**

**BE SOUND.**

**CHANGE THINGS.**

**FUN IS IMPORTANT.**

**FAILURE IS FUEL.**



# STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

We have identified four areas of strategic priority which provide a focus for our efforts in the coming years.

- **THE FESTIVAL**
- **THE ARTIST & ARTFORM**
- **THE AUDIENCE**
- **THE ORGANISATION**

These priorities and the objectives under each should be considered as complementing and reinforcing each other to advance our ambitions.

**AS WELL AS OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES WE HAVE ALSO IDENTIFIED THAT PARTNERSHIP AND COLLABORATION IS ESSENTIAL TO OUR SUCCESS.**

**WE ARE PROUD OF THE RELATIONSHIPS WE HAVE ESTABLISHED WITH OUR EXISTING FUNDING AND CREATIVE PARTNERS. WE LOOK FORWARD TO CONTINUING TO WORK CLOSELY WITH THEM AND TO FORGING NEW ALLIANCES THAT WILL SUPPORT AND ENABLE US TO ACHIEVE OUR AMBITIONS FOR ARTISTS AND AUDIENCES AND FOR THE CITY.**

# STRATEGIC PRIORITY

#1

# THE FESTIVAL



**GOAL****DUBLIN FRINGE FESTIVAL IS AN UNMISSABLE, BOUNDARY-PUSHING CELEBRATION ACROSS THE CITY****Why this goal?**

The festival is who we are and what we do. It's a 16 day art party and everyone is invited. Over the next five years, we will continue our presentation of an agenda-setting programme that introduces new talent, expands artform and instigates conversation. We will push the boundaries of where and how the festival activates the city in partnership with key stakeholders. The festival will continue to be a launchpad for careers and ideas, multiplying future opportunities through a targeted, engaged network of collaborators.

**OBJECTIVES**

1. Curate a compelling, coherent and distinctive programme where the popular and the experimental converge.
2. Maintain our commitment to increasing equality of representation in programming.
3. Present a programme of cutting-edge international work that acts as a provocation to artists and audiences.
4. Commission inventive projects from artists in Ireland that play with form and push boundaries.
5. Work with key stakeholders to make space in the city for artists and audiences to play.

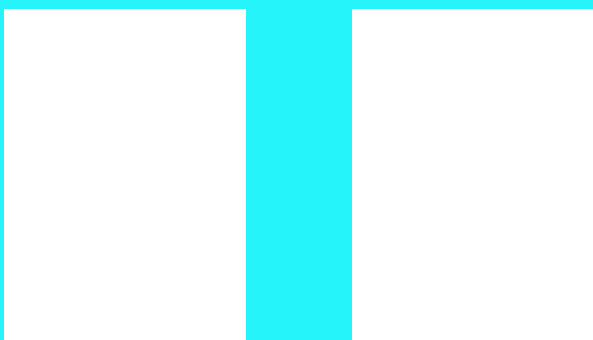
**OUTCOMES**

1. Dublin Fringe Festival is unmissable.
2. Our programme megaphones a multitude of perspectives and voices from a broad range of communities and contexts.
3. Game-changing international work is expanding horizons for artists and audiences and asserting the festival's curatorial vision and identity.
4. The commissioning of new interdisciplinary projects and work that innovates artform is core to what we do and is building a critical body of work.
5. We have access to more spaces and more places in Dublin for artists to create and present work.

# STRATEGIC PRIORITY

#2

# THE ARTIST AND ARTFORM



**GOAL****DUBLIN FRINGE FESTIVAL HOLDS A POWERFUL SPACE FOR ARTISTS TO ADVANCE THEIR PRACTICE AND TO EXTEND THE POSSIBILITIES OF WHAT ART CAN BE****Why this goal?**

To embolden Irish cultural futures we must stay devoted to the twin goals of talent development and artform development. This work is essential to maintaining a vibrant arts ecology in Ireland. We acknowledge the high stakes for early career artists, those making radical work and those traditionally under-represented in the arts. We respond to their ambitions and courage by creating a safe space for their dreams, supporting experimentation and ensuring freedom to take risks. Our relationships with artists are built on trust, respect and fidelity to artistic vision.

**OBJECTIVES**

1. Maintain a framework for artistic risk through a curated suite of presentation supports and resources.
2. Seek out and build relationships with early career and genre-defying artists.
3. Cultivate visible, approachable entry-points for artists via FRINGE LAB, maintaining a year-round open-door policy and creating opportunities for peer network building.
4. Identify and remove barriers to access to our programmes, resources and opportunities.
5. Lead thinking and conversation about new and contemporary performance practice and artform development.
6. Advocate for the improvement of the working lives of artists and amplify the work of other movements and campaigns who share this goal.

**OUTCOMES**

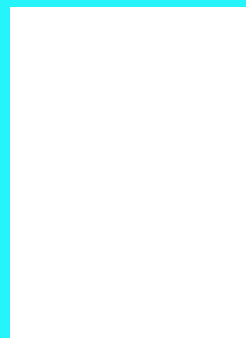
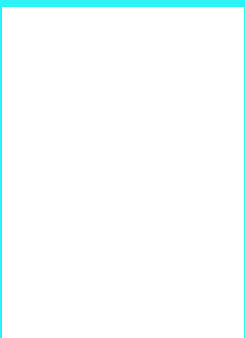
1. Artists are experimenting with artform and advancing their practice within a system of bespoke supports.
2. We are introducing a new generation of artists and bold new artforms.
3. Aspiring and emerging artists are networking and developing skills in a community where they feel welcome.
4. Targeted supports are ensuring artists from communities traditionally under-represented in the arts have more access to our opportunities.
5. We are a catalyst for new ideas, alternative approaches and big ambitions. Artists are inspired and emboldened through their engagement with us.
6. Our efforts, together with other industry advocates, are advancing sustainable living and working conditions for artists.



# STRATEGIC PRIORITY

#3

# THE AUDIENCE



**GOAL****MORE PEOPLE FEEL WELCOME AT AND ENJOY  
DUBLIN FRINGE FESTIVAL****Why this goal?**

Dublin Fringe Festival believes that art is for everyone. We position ourselves where the popular and the experimental converge. We want the festival to offer the broadest possible invitation to potential audiences in Dublin and beyond. We want to build communities of interest and place who understand what we do and look forward to being part of the festival. We want to inspire a wider and deeper understanding of the value of artists and their work to society.

**OBJECTIVES**

1. Build and sustain a loyal festival community of new, existing and alumni artists and audiences.
2. Ensure the promotion of the festival continues to be welcoming and inventive, to utilise new methodologies and to reach and entice audiences under 35 as well as first-time Dublin Fringe Festival goers of all ages.
3. Create entry points to the festival in our artistic programme, through our volunteer programme, affordable tickets and by diversifying our community and venue partnerships.
4. Enhance our understanding of our audience base to identify areas for ongoing development.
5. Inspire a better understanding of the value of art in society and support for the artists who make it amongst our audiences.

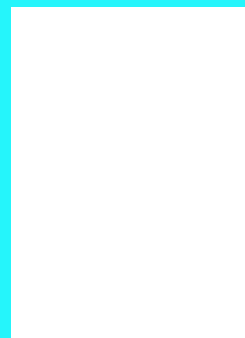
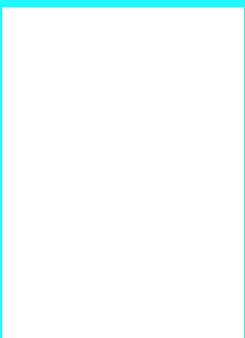
**OUTCOMES**

1. We have an active, connected community of avid supporters who champion the festival and our work.
2. We are sustaining and building our audiences by popular and captivating campaigns and increased year-round digital marketing activity.
3. We are finding and engaging new and more diverse audiences, meeting them where they are and forging relationships for the future.
4. Better knowledge of and insight into our existing and potential audience base is increasing attendance and deepening engagement.
5. Our audiences join us in advocating for artists through small acts of solidarity and by supporting our big picture provocations.

# STRATEGIC PRIORITY

#4

# THE ORGANISATION



**GOAL****DUBLIN FRINGE FESTIVAL HAS THE RESOURCES AND RESILIENCE TO DELIVER ON THE AMBITIONS OF THIS STRATEGY****Why this goal?**

Dublin Fringe Festival thrives on its relentless ambition and continues to grow. The organisation needs a high-performing team and a network of partners to sustain excellence and deepen impact. In the next five years, we must ensure our ability to prosper sustainably and with resilience, securing the resources, knowledge and imagination necessary to fulfil our goals.

**OBJECTIVES**

1. Increase the skills and capacity of the organisation to ensure its sustainable impact.
2. Maintain rigor and excellence of governance and management, adhering to best practice protocols and planning for succession.
3. Strengthen and diversify our revenue base, deepening our relationship with the Arts Council and Dublin City Council and building other financially advantageous alliances.
4. Reinforce the Dublin Fringe Festival brand to ensure its local, national and international recognition and appeal.
5. Advance our equity action plan in service of a more fair and inclusive future for artists, audiences, volunteers and staff.
6. Continue to create opportunities for artists to inform organisational decision-making.
7. Put in place processes of review and reflection to ensure our organisational well-being, influence and impact.

**OUTCOMES**

1. We have a motivated team of eight people working closely together year-round who have the skills and exceptional personal qualities required to advance our ambitions.
2. Our future continues to be secured by active, responsible governance and diligent management at every level.
3. We have multiple, multi-year funding relationships with a diverse range of statutory and commercial partners.
4. We have amplified our profile and positioning as an unmissable, world-class event in Dublin.
5. Our festival community is reflective of the faces and voices of Ireland now and we are working every day towards a fairer future.
6. Our integrity and relevance as an artist-focused organisation is assured.
7. We have delivered on our strategic ambitions with a measured approach, maintaining a positive work environment.





*Púcaparty by  
Glitter HOLE*

**Photo**  
Simon Lazewski  
2019





# IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING

Our strategy will be delivered through annual implementation plans. As part of the process to develop an annual plan, we will review progress on and ensure the continued relevance of our strategic priorities, goals and objectives. To that end, we will conduct a thorough mid-term review of the strategy in late 2024.

## POLICY CONTEXT

Dublin Fringe Festival's strategy sits alongside and responds to a number of national and local strategies, principally **Making Great Art Work**, the Arts Council's ten-year strategy (2016 – 2025), which has five areas of strategic priority: the artist, public engagement, investment, spatial and demographic planning and capacity development.

A number of discrete Arts Council policies have also informed our thinking here and will continue to guide our work, including:

- **Equality, Human Rights and Diversity Policy** which 'strives to respect, support and ensure the inclusion of all voices and cultures that make up Ireland today, from all sections of society, from existing and new communities, and from all social backgrounds, ethnicities and traditions.'
- **Paying the Artist Policy** promoting 'equitable and fair remuneration and contracting within the arts'.
- **Place, Space and People Policy**, a new framework for socio-spatial equity in the arts presenting a vision 'for a country where everyone has the opportunity to create, engage with, participate in and enjoy the arts and culture, regardless of who they are or where they live and work'.
- **Festivals Policy and Strategy** which sets out the Arts Council's approach, specific developmental objectives and other areas of strategic interest for festivals to advance its twin priorities of the artist and public engagement in the period 2020-2025.

As an organisation in and of the city, Dublin Fringe Festival attends to relevant plans for Dublin. We look forward to playing our part within the ambitions for the arts and for the city as expressed in the **Dublin City Council's Development Plan (2022-2028)** and the new **Arts Plan** currently under development.

We also understand and value the European context of our work. We will continue to monitor and situate what we do in relation to relevant programmes such as **Creative Europe**.

**Photo**  
Simon Lazewski 2016





*Hive City Legacy:  
Dublin Chapter  
by Hot Brown  
Honey*

**Photo**  
Tessy Media 2022



Comhairle Cathrach  
Bhaile Átha Cliath  
Dublin City Council



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## CREDITS

This strategy was developed and approved by the Board of Dublin Fringe Festival following consultation with the Dublin Fringe Festival executive, team, funding, programme and community stakeholders.

## BOARD MEMBERS

Niamh O'Donnell (chair), Julie Blakeney, Dan Colley, Luke Hardcastle, Miles Harrigan, Lara Hickey, Carly McKenna, Brian Melarkey, Áine Mulloy. Emeritus: Mary Dunphy, Dave Harland

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With special thanks to Janice McAdam (Independent Consultant) for her rigour and care and our creative collaborators bigO (Design) for bringing the vision to life. Thank you to all the artists, audiences, colleagues and friends who participated in the surveys, workshops and consultations for their insight and their belief in Dublin Fringe Festival. This work as made possible with the support of the Arts Council's Capacity Building Fund.

**THANK YOU**

