



IRISH
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ASSOCIATION

STRATEGY 2023 - 2027



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Introduction

The Irish Museums Association's Strategy 2023 - 2027 builds on the aims of previous strategies, outlining our vision of a strong organisation that advocates for our membership and bolsters the museum sector across the island of Ireland. Framed in a post-pandemic context, it reflects the changing environment in which the museum sector meets the challenges faced by our society and has been informed by extensive consultation with our membership, our partners, and members of the wider cultural and heritage communities.

2027 will see the 50th anniversary of the foundation of the IMA. This provides us not only with the opportunity to reflect on the achievements of both the Association and the sector during this half-century period, to celebrate what we do well and continue to do this, but also to be self-critical and identify areas of improvement and avenues through which we can enact change and continue to have a vital impact on our communities.

As the ambitions of the IMA have grown, so have expectations for - and from - the organisation. Over the next five years, we aim to grow the Association and provide increased capacity to meet these demands, while ensuring we continue to extend a welcoming, equitable, and supportive platform.

By 2027, we aim to have strengthened the Association's operational capacity and expanded our reach and resources to better support the sector: our advocacy work is among one of the offerings that our members have identified as the most important to them. To extend this, we need to adequately resource our programme offering - which informs this work - and evidence how the museum sector has transformed in recent years to fulfil an increasingly vital role in our society. We therefore commit to working with our membership, our supporters, and partners to co-create and deliver offerings that meet their needs and lead conversations; to encourage the improvement of museum practice, access to our cultural heritage, and evidence the impact of the museum as we work together as a society to reach the objectives of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals in creating a better future for all.



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Highlights 2018-2022

Over the course of our Strategy 2018-2022, we have seen phenomenal progress within the IMA. We have been successful in growing our membership by 52% and - in no small part due to the financial support secured from the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media and The Heritage Council of Ireland - our annual turnover has increased by 114%. This investment by our stakeholders has allowed us to deliver on the aims identified in 2018 and empowered us with the capacity to build into the future.

We have continually monitored and evaluated our outputs against the priorities outlined in our last Strategy 2018-2022, approaching this as a living document and reviewing elements where necessary in response to changing circumstances but maintaining a clear goal in mind: to support the Irish Museums Sector and our membership community as they care for and interpret the collections they hold in trust for the benefit of all.

Internally, we examined the IMA's governance and operations through the lens of the ESGs: we voluntarily adopted the Charity Regulation Authority Governance Code, welcomed five new board members, completed the roll-out of our institutional membership, implemented a new integrated members management system, developed and launched new IMA branding, secured support in kind for our office, benchmarked and reviewed compensation to staff and contributors, and appointed a new part-time membership support officer (2021-22). As early adopters of online management solutions and with strong operational frameworks in place, we were well positioned to seamlessly move to hybrid/online platforms to boost our offerings in early 2020 - which in turn bolstered our environmental sustainability efforts by reducing travel and waste.

In addition to core annual events such as our themed Conferences, Ed+O forums, and Museum Basics foundation courses - we extended new cross-border learning exchanges in 2019 and 2020, increased our training output to an annual average of 20 CPD opportunities, and developed a new informal online networking programme. Overall, this allowed us to offer over 3000 opportunities to museum staff to participate in our activities, supported by 264 speakers.



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To augment our dissemination programme, we moved our annual journal, *Museum Ireland*, online to provide open access, developed and launched a new, activated website in 2018, and doubled our newsletter output to monthly editions with a click rate growth of 10% and increased social media following across the three main platforms by 72% in the five-year period.

We have also continued to collate, commission, and disseminate research and use this to inform our advocacy work. Examples of this are our *Bridge over Brexit* project in partnership with Ulster University, which ran 2018 - 2020, since then extended through a Collaborative Doctoral Award partnership on EU Funding and cross-border activity and, during the pandemic, our campaigns and sectoral guidance for Reopening Irish museums, the Museums Now media campaign, and a survey of the status quo of the Irish Museum sector. Also in 2020-2021, we published a report on School engagement during and post-COVID, the starting point for a new research project on learning and engagement with the CNCI LEG group, along with extending a new small grant funding scheme in partnership with IMT that aims to support individual research efforts among our members.

In continuing to be at the forefront of current conversations and encouraging new thinking within the sector, the impact of our programming is evident: in 2018, our emphasis on contemporary collecting empowered our members to incorporate this into their work practices, while our ongoing programming and research partnerships exploring colonial legacy and sustainability issues has furthered both knowledge and practice in these areas, with a wider recognition of both the impact on and by museums and their own role in furthering these discussions, encouraging them to take actions that include audits of their practices and collections and helping to raise public awareness.

Our activity has seen our presence grow on both the national and international stage: in 2018 and 2021, we presented on behalf of the museum sector to relevant Oireachtas Committees on, respectively, the Regional and Rural museums landscape and the effects of the pandemic, while, in 2018, we presented to the Ministry of Culture, Spain, on the changing nature of our workforce. We represented the Network of European Museum Organisations (NEMO) on the Heritage Council EYCH network, 2018 - 2020 and, since 2021, are invited stakeholder contributors to Ireland's Agenda 2030 Implementation Plan for Built and Archaeological Heritage.

We are represented on The Heritage Council's Museum Standards Programme for Ireland (MPSI) Advisory Group, on the Irish Museums Trust (IMT), Visual Artists Ireland, and Encountering the Arts Ireland boards of directors, and participate in a diverse range of working and expert advisory groups. In 2018, we signed a Memo of Understanding with the MA UK and increasingly work more closely with the NI Museums Council to ensure sharing of knowledge and capacity building opportunities that meet the particular needs of our members in Northern Ireland and we are active members of NEMO's Director's group, connecting us closely with our European peers and allowing us to support international learning opportunities for IMA members.

It is difficult to resume the depth and extent of our activity over the past five years and there are many projects and developments not included above for which we would like to acknowledge our members' support and assistance in developing. However, we hope this short summary provides insight and context as we present our new Strategy 2023-2027 and look to both strengthening and growing our sector and community over the coming years.

Our Vision, Mission and Values

Our vision

To inspire and nurture a strong and vibrant museum community across the island of Ireland.

Our Mission

To represent and champion the museum sector so that everyone, visitors and practitioners, can enjoy the maximum cultural, social and educational benefits. To develop excellence in museum practice, the gathering and exchange of knowledge, identify issues of concern to the museum community and advocate their valuable contribution to society.

Our Values

Excellence: We encourage and promote excellence in the museum sector, creating relevant experiences for our members and providing a platform for contemporary discourse around museum practice.

Inclusivity: We recognise the diversity of communities that are served by our museums and the role of museums in fostering a more sustainable future across the island of Ireland.

Collaboration: We believe in the power of partnerships and alliances across sectors and the strength of speaking as a united voice to promote and develop the field as a whole.



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Our Main Imperatives

Strengthen the museum community

In a diverse sector, one that answers to multiple stakeholders across different jurisdictions, it is crucial that we extend a united voice and seek to provide a space of unity and equity, one that celebrates our shared cultural heritage, discussion, and collaborations, and inspires our communities to engage with the rich cultural collections that museums hold in trust.

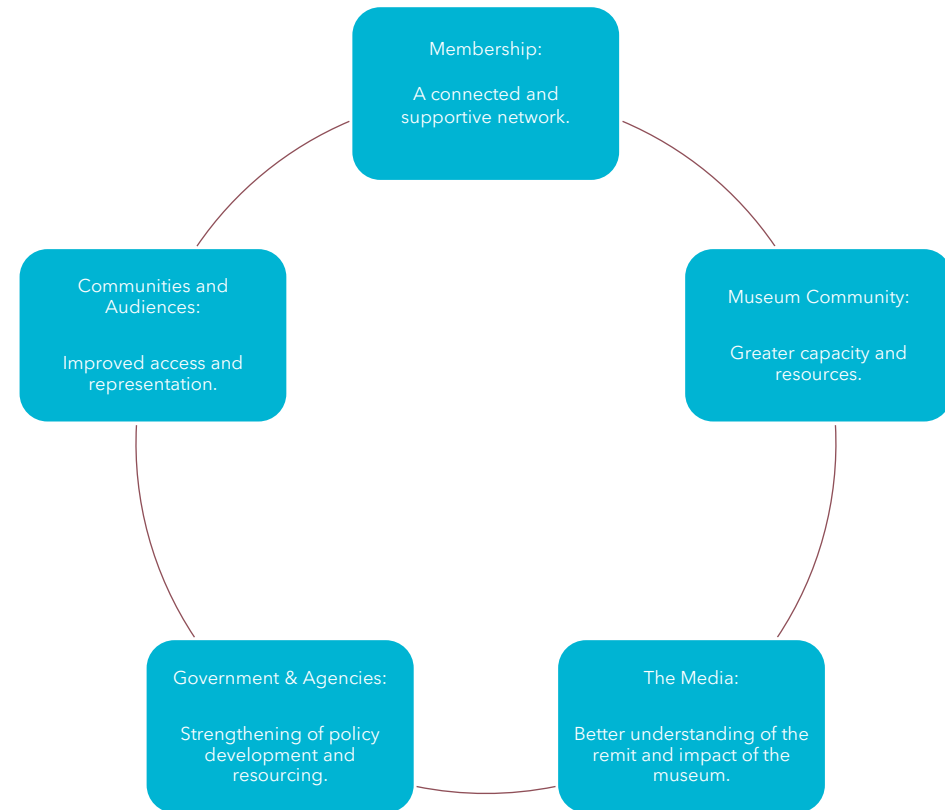
Demonstrate Impact

Our museums make an important contribution to our society as places of learning, conservation, research, and interpretation; these are the record of our past, the touchpoint for our present, and our legacy for future generations. We will aim to advocate for wider recognition of their impact through evidence-based quantitative and qualitative research.

Ensure Sustainability

Our sector exercises a high level of soft power in encouraging positive change, in our economy, environment, and social interactions. In seeking increased resourcing, both internally and for our members, we aim to strengthen this work and compliment wider efforts towards a better future.

Stakeholder-specific aims





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Our Aims

1 Provide and Nurture Leadership

We will strengthen our advocacy and speak confidently on behalf of our community, informing and providing evidence on their development, their needs, and their positive contribution to society.

We will seek to empower individual members of our community to be strong ambassadors and help them realise their leadership potential.

We will provide an essential resource for government and agencies in the development of policy and guidelines for our, and related, sectors.

3 Build a Vibrant and Inclusive Community

We will strengthen our collective voice by growing and nurturing our membership, ensuring that it is representative of the diversity of the Irish museum community.

We will serve our community to the best of our ability, providing opportunities for them to be actively engaged in our work towards identifying and addressing common goals.

We will nurture a culture that is rooted in our values and that prioritises intellectual honesty, curiosity, experimentation, learning, and an ethical approach.

2 Support Museum Practice

We will continue to support the full remit and functions of the museum, as identified by ICOM's definition of museums.

We will identify and nurture opportunities for museum workers and museums to make the most of the unique role they hold in our society and their contribution to societal thinking.

We will provide evidence of the positive effect of good museum practice on our communities and make this publicly and widely accessible.

4 Deliver Successfully

We will lead by example, keeping abreast of good governance and administrative practice, and openly promote how we work to encourage others.

We will aim to stabilise the resources available to us and seek opportunities to enhance these.

We will involve our members in decision and policy-making, encouraging their input, feedback, and ideas.



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Our Actions



1 Provide and Nurture Leadership

1.1. Strengthen our engagement with public representatives in a two-way dialogue to identify and address areas of policy development, such as the development of a national museum policy and cultural reparations policy.

1.2. Actively pursue opportunities for our sector to contribute to wider societal discussions, such as implementation of Agenda 2030, through increased participation in consultations, expert advisory/working group participation, sectoral representation, and other such activities as they arise.

1.3. Ensure we are abreast of changes and new thinking within the museum and cultural heritage-related sectors by continuing to nurture our connections with national and international agencies and networks.

1.4. Collate high-quality research evidence to inform, stimulate thinking and underpin public policy goals, undertaking or seeking collaborative approaches to enable new research where needed.

1.5. Review our governance structure to ensure we enable participation and opportunity for members to provide and fulfil leadership roles within the network, by developing and nurturing expert advisory and working groups.

1.6. Expand our programming to include leadership training across all levels of practice within our sector, working with expert disciplinary and cultural leadership course partners where relevant.

2 Support Museum Practice

2.1. Extend relevant and appropriate platforms for the exchange of knowledge and resources, to provide tools and encourage increased professionalisation of practice to all those who need it.

2.2. Raise awareness of professional standards and encourage our members to participate in the Museum Standards Programme for Ireland, overseen by the Heritage Council of Ireland, and the Museum Accreditation Scheme, overseen by the NI Museums Council.

2.3. Identify training gaps and resources and deliver continued professional development activity aimed at supporting good museum practice at different stages of the career journey.

2.4. Seek and resource opportunities to share and promote best practice from museums across Ireland and workers within our sector both nationally and internationally.

2.5. Reinforce our communications through the development of a dedicated communications and engagement strategy, to promote public understanding of the wide and diverse remit and impact of museums.

2.6. Scope the potential for membership benefits beyond the IMA's internal offerings, to offer a more comprehensive package of services to our members.

3 Build a Vibrant Community

- 3.1. Provide a supportive and welcoming environment, one that prioritises equity and dignity in our interactions with members.
- 3.2. Resource internal communications with our membership, to enable more frequent and clear channels of dialogue.
- 3.3. Review our membership structure and offerings to ensure we provide an informed and strong voice and members can avail of the maximum benefits provided by the network.
- 3.4. Strengthen communication channels with national and local government bodies and agencies, and networks within the museum and wider cultural sectors, to enable a fluid dialogue and interchange of ideas.
- 3.5. Seek to develop partnerships with relevant organisations to improve physical and intellectual access to museum services.
- 3.6. Commit to an increased geographical spread of our programme offerings.
- 3.7. Engage more deeply with relevant 3rd level educational institutions and core discipline life-long learning providers to nurture allies within those entering the wider cultural sector.

4 Deliver Successfully

- 4.1. Provide a personalised and approachable service, and maintain a generous culture of sharing, supportive of both institutions and individuals within our community.
- 4.2. Seek common ground and alignment of our objectives and those of our stakeholders, to support joined-up efforts for the development of our sector and promote long-term planning.
- 4.3. Review and enhance our processes, with a particular emphasis on building trust and transparency around our activity and governance.
- 4.4. Optimise our use of digital technology to provide a more accessible and user-friendly platform.
- 4.5. Seek to resource increased staffing levels within the IMA through diversification of funding and earned income, ensuring capacity to deliver and strengthening legacy planning.
- 4.6. Develop a funding touchpoint on the IMA website to inform of opportunities, assist in financial planning, and encourage uptake.
- 4.7. Increase dissemination outputs to include further guidelines, toolkits, information, and publications relevant to activity in the Irish museum sector.

Delivery and Monitoring

The Strategy 2023 - 2027 will inform our public programme and work-plans, prepared annually by the executive and guided by the board of directors' oversight committees: Audit, Risk & Management, External Relations, Advocacy and Programming.

It will be internally revised and monitored in the following manner:

- Strategic Plan: Annually reviewed by the board of directors, informed by the relevant oversight committee
- Programme delivery: Bi-monthly by the board of directors, informed by the executive.
- Budget and resources management: By the executive and the IMA treasurer, bi-monthly presented and reported to the board of directors.

In the same manner in which the 2023 - 2027 Strategy was developed through consultation with our stakeholders, our aim is to be held accountable to its delivery through transparent, open access end of year reporting against the objectives of the plan.

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