

CORK'S CULTURAL CATALYST
Sample-Studios Strategic Plan
2023-2027

"I cannot imagine being the artist I am without Sample-Studios.
It's such a catalyst for pushing your practice forward –
the professional development, the culture.
It raises all ships."
Edith, Artist Member

Sample-Studios

Where We Make Great Art Work

—

**Launching,
supporting,
sustaining
creative careers
and practices
in Cork**

Our Impact in 2021:
80+ artists
35 studios and facilities
3 residencies
16 exhibitions
150+ events
5 education programmes
16,000 visitors

Sample-Studios members

return **€23.53¹** to the **Cork economy** for
every **€1** invested in the organisation
by **Cork City Council**

¹ In 2021 Sample-Studios received €17,000 in grant income from Cork City Council; cumulatively Sample-Studios and our artists delivered over €400,000 of spend to our City, based on grants, sales and other income from creative endeavours.

INTRODUCTION

Sample-Studios was set up in 2011 as a volunteer, artist-led organisation, based at Sullivan's Quay, to provide affordable studio space to artists from across artforms in Cork City Centre. We provide a creative environment through shared facilities, affordable individual studio workspaces, and capacity building support.

Now a professional arts organisation and registered charity based in rented accommodation at Churchfield on the north side of Cork city, with exhibition spaces in The Lord Mayor's Pavilion in Fitzgerald's Park and St Luke's, we are keen to consolidate and future-proof more than a decade of supports for artists, by identifying a permanent home in which to achieve all our ambitions.

Sample-Studios provides resources, space, support and professional development to over 80 artists in a variety of disciplines. That support and promotion is focused on emerging and established contemporary practitioners from Cork and beyond, while we also develop, deliver, and sustain local, regional, and international initiatives and partnerships. This includes strong links with the local community through outreach projects across the city created in partnership with local and national funding partners.

We have been cited by funders and partners for our leadership and our pragmatic management, and we are seen as valuable contributors to the creative community in Cork and beyond through creating and curating work across Europe's most culturally vibrant city².

- Our visual arts programme is vibrant, diverse, and present in Cork, both in our exhibition venues, and across the city in pop up sites and interventions
- our annual Residencies ensure a nurturing environment for emerging and marginalised artists and practitioners wishing to develop careers in the supportive and experienced environment of our member network
- the visual arts programme has proven an effective training ground for aspiring curators and emerging artists, giving them opportunities and a platform that are not available to them in other respects in Cork
- we support creativity and innovation in the community through educational programming in schools and with young people outside the school system
- we promote arts research and community outreach projects through educational and participatory events
- we respond to the need among artists and arts practitioners for tailored professional development and mentorship supports
- we engage our membership in studio exchange partnerships both nationally and internationally

In 2022, Sample-Studios is funded by The Arts Council of Ireland, Cork City Council, Creative Ireland, and the Community Foundation for Ireland; and supported by ESB Energy for Generations Fund, the Bank of Ireland Begin Together Fund, and Gurrabraher Credit Union. We have an active and dynamic Board who work closely with the Executive.

This Strategic Plan is structured to keep Sample-Studios relevant and resourced. It is a tool to achieve that and arm us with what we need to have useful and purposeful conversations with the people who can help us on the journey of continued growth.

2 In 2017, the first European Union 'Cultural and Creative Cities Monitor' named Cork as Europe's most culturally vibrant city.

LOCAL AND NATIONAL CONTEXT

This Strategy was developed in early 2022 as Ireland began to emerge from two years of continuous safety protocols to manage the global COVID-19 pandemic. We believe the organisation thrived in the challenging environment when our resilience was tested, proved and strengthened. The period saw growth in our membership, our income, and our executive.

Our strategy for the next five years is written and will be delivered in line with the Arts Council's own '***Making Great Art Work 2016-2025 Strategy***', which focuses on the interdependent priorities of the artist and public engagement; alongside our shared belief that the more people who engage in the arts and the greater their social diversity, the more significant the societal benefits deriving from their investments.

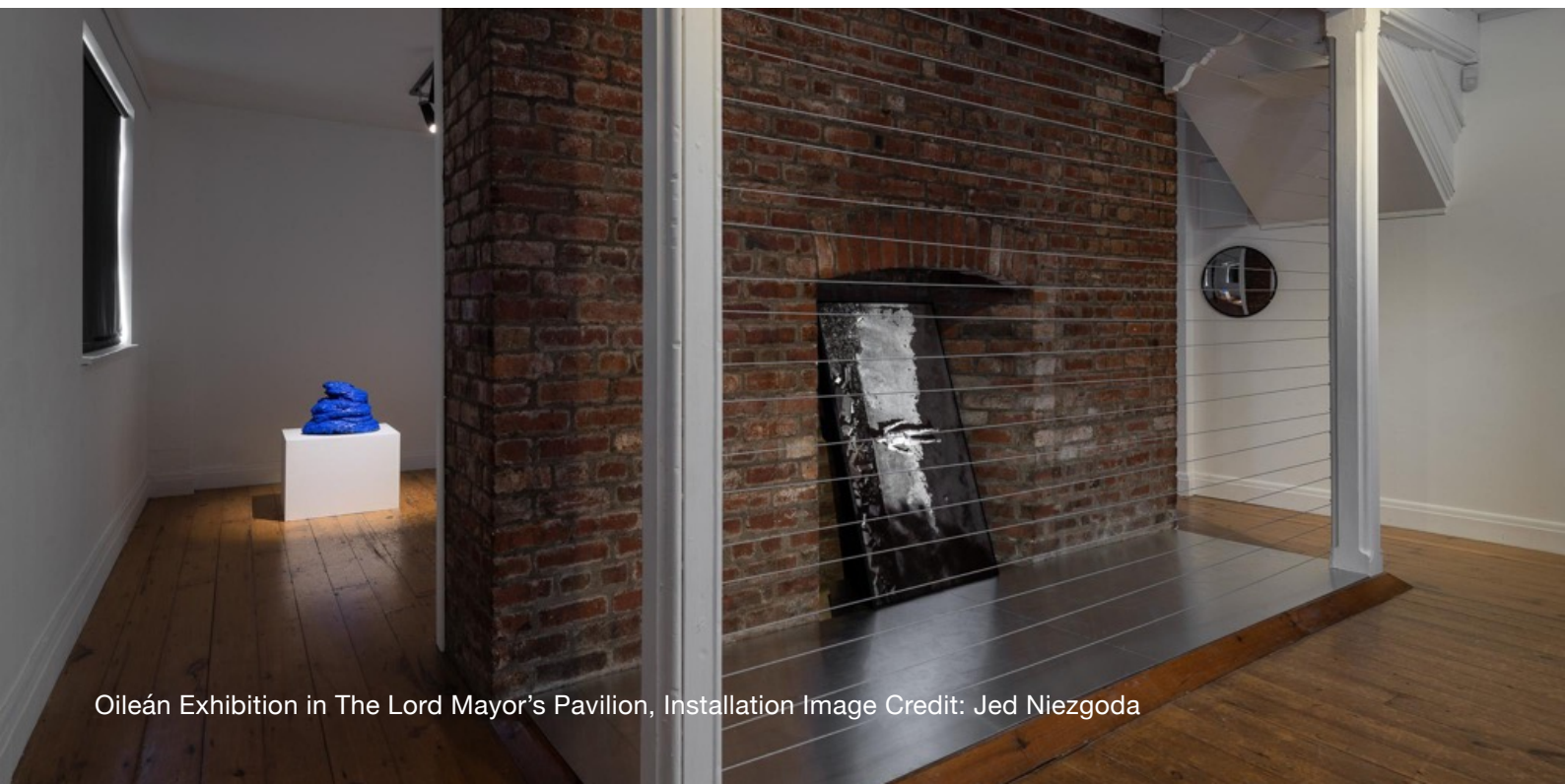
The Arts Council's '***Equality, Human Rights and Diversity Strategy and Policy***' (2019) strives to respect, support and ensure inclusion of all voices and cultures that make up Ireland today, from all sections of society, existing and new communities, from all social backgrounds, ethnicities and traditions. The breadth of our work in communities across Cork shows our ambitions and shared values in this work, and speaks also to ***Creative Ireland's strategic ambition*** to connect people, creativity, and wellbeing to inspire and transform.

In line with the Arts Council's '***Paying the Artist Policy***' (2020) we will develop our own policy on fair and equitable remuneration and contracting of artists for exhibitions, workshops and commissions.

At Sample-Studios we see ourselves as playing a vital role in the enrichment of this region, and the cultural identity of Cork's artistic scene. In the lockdown periods of 2020 and 2021, we took a strong position in advocating for artists in the spaces and places where others are not, or can not.

The Cork City Arts Plan was in development during the writing of this Strategic Plan, but we have actively fed into the process and are confident that our ambitions will be in line with the Council's cultural ambitions for the city. We also submit to the Cork City Council Development Plan 2022-2028, and note and support the objectives included in the Draft Plan aimed to promote and further develop Cork as a centre of excellence for arts, culture and the creative industries; ensure the nurturing of associated services; encourage sustainable tourism development, promoting diversification and innovation; conservation, protection and enhancement of natural, built and cultural heritage; ensure development reflects the historical importance and character of the city etc.

The work on this Strategic Plan followed an intensive series of workshops around brand, vision and mission in early 2021. The conversation to scaffold the Plan began in earnest in late 2021 and early 2022 with workshops with the executive, the Board, and artist members. One-on-one interviews were also held with key stakeholders in Cork City Council, the Arts Council, and other funders and partners.



Oileán Exhibition in The Lord Mayor's Pavilion, Installation Image Credit: Jed Niezgoda

OUR STRENGTHS

At Sample-Studios, support and community are at the centre of our ethos and thinking. No other organisation in Cork launches, supports, or sustains creative careers in as tailored, impactful and measured a way as we do.

The diversity of our membership is a key strength of our organisation. In speaking with Sample-Studio members to develop this Strategic Plan, we were struck by their unprompted acknowledgement of the singular support of the Sample-Studios team and its real and meaningful impact on members' achievements, individually and collectively, raising them up; creating and infecting the organisation with a growing confidence and embedding peer to peer support which is meaningful and impactful. Time and again they mentioned the **professional development**, the **mentorship** and level of support that is embedded in the organisation's culture is not being experienced by their peers in other studio organisations³. This is our USP (unique selling point), which is acknowledged and supported by The Arts Council.

Sample-Studios delivers **compelling cultural programmes**, connecting to hardly-reached communities in Cork, such as those on the north side of the city, who experience a dearth of cultural provision. Our **education programmes** are unique in Cork and offer meaningful access to the arts through local practitioners to children and young people, as well as the wider community.

Our member artists observe challenges in the cultural infrastructure in Cork, with two nationally positioned visual arts programming institutions that aren't connected extensively to the grassroots activity in the city, and "nothing in the middle". They observed that artists have to go elsewhere to progress their careers, and to exhibit. Sample-Studios is the differentiator in Cork on this. We ensure that artists can thrive in Cork, with **facilities, enabling supports**, and a **peer network**. Our **residencies**, which provide pathways to professional practice for emerging and marginalised artists, are part of our strategy to actively prevent a haemorrhaging of talent from this region.

Sample-Studios also delivers an ambitious, diverse and inclusive **programme of visual arts exhibitions** in The Lord Mayor's Pavilion and other venues throughout the City which platforms the work of our members, supports artform development and engages wider audiences with artistic excellence.

This Strategic Plan will drive us to focus on areas for growth and improvement in the coming years, including securing a more permanent home, growing our executive cohort, and marketing ourselves more effectively, to tell the story of our impact in the networks we need to.

OUR PROGRAMMES: THE PILLARS OF WHAT WE DO AND DELIVERY MECHANISMS

IN	OUT	BUILD / GROW
Churchfield	Lord Mayor's Pavilion & Venues	Permanent home
Affordable studios	Exhibitions	Professional development
Communal facilities	Events	Residencies
Workshops	Education & Outreach	Studio Exchange Activity
Studio visits	Partnerships & collaborations	Schools programme
Artists' talks	Exhibitions programme	Mentorship
Partnerships	Partnerships	Partnerships

³ It is estimated that in 2021, Sample-Studios members secured an additional €200,000 in awards and bursaries, arising from professional development and mentorship support they received from Sample-Studios in accessing those funds.

OUR STRATEGIC INTENT

Although funded by the Arts Council, Cork City Council through the Arts Office, and with a developing relationship with Creative Ireland, we work broadly across the creative sector in Cork and beyond. In the main, our work is with artists in visual arts and across multiple art forms, but we also work to grow capacity in creative producers, curators, arts administrators, and the support system for the cultural and arts sector.

OUR PURPOSE

At Sample-Studios we launch, support, and sustain creative careers and practices in Cork.

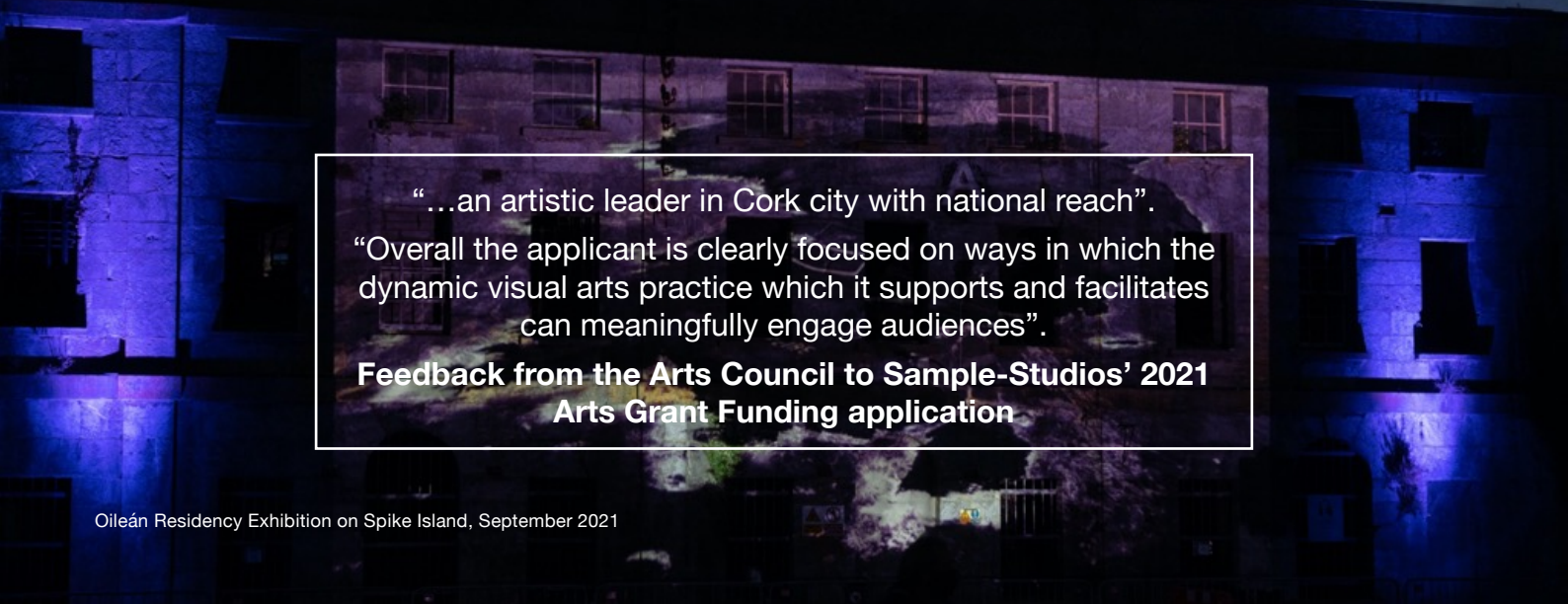
OUR VISION

Sample-Studios will be a catalyst in the artistic and cultural vibrancy of Cork and the creative community beyond.

OUR MISSION

We deliver on our purpose and vision to drive creative practice and cultural vibrancy in Cork through:

- high quality and affordable **studio space**
- **professional development** and educational supports
- **opportunities** to show or make work with local, national and international partners and the community



“...an artistic leader in Cork city with national reach”.

“Overall the applicant is clearly focused on ways in which the dynamic visual arts practice which it supports and facilitates can meaningfully engage audiences”.

Feedback from the Arts Council to Sample-Studios' 2021 Arts Grant Funding application



OUR ARTISTIC POLICY

We are the destination studio in Ireland, known for our support for artists. We are dynamic and operating on a number of levels. Sample-Studios is independent, but core to the cultural diversity of Cork. Our artist member reach is growing nationally.

Sample-Studios presents a free, ambitious and diverse programme of visual art exhibitions in the Lord Mayor's Pavilion, Fitzgerald Park, and venues throughout Cork, supported by the Arts Council and Cork City Council.

STRATEGIC AMBITIONS

Over the next five years, Sample-Studios will focus on delivering the following strategic ambitions, towards delivering our vision to be a catalyst in the artistic and cultural vibrancy of Cork and the creative community beyond, and that we are appropriately resourced and supported to continue to launch, support and sustain creative careers and practices in Cork.

The order of the ambitions listed is not meant to suggest a hierarchy of need, importance or delivery date. All are important to deliver on our goals.

ART & ARTISTS

Sample-Studios supports excellence in the visual arts and a range of artforms by creating a hub for artists, enabling their practices and developing networks of creative practice. We will continue to do deliver and enhance this offering in the coming five years by:

1. We will keep foremost in our ambitions, the safeguarding of affordable workspaces for artists, and continue to advocate widely for professional supports for artists to solidify our position as the leading studio organisation in the country in terms of measurable impact on the careers of member artists.
2. Continue to support working artists to work individually, together, create community, and learn from each other. Launch and support the next generation of artists, arts managers, and cultural practitioners with full support of programmes, opportunities and connections to sustainable professional practice.
3. We will identify opportunities to show and platform more members' work, through innovative partnerships with local and national partners to raise our profile and consolidate our impact on our members' practices.
4. We will work strategically across the City Council, and engage with the wider creative sector in Cork and beyond, to activate the opportunities that exist within Europe's most culturally vibrant City, through their culture, creative industries and tourism activities.
5. Seek to further understand and address the barriers to accessing Sample-Studios' services, providing or developing multiple ways to engage with us, to ensure more diverse artists and audiences are included, and can participate in and access culture.
6. We are proud to have used the support of the Arts Council to build the impact we have on our members' careers, and to use their support and belief in our mission, to advocate for innovative funding partnerships elsewhere. We will seek to consolidate our position with the Arts Council with the view to achieving Strategic Funding status within the life of this Strategic Plan.

7. Create signature programming around the city for our 15th anniversary, such as art in the park by Sample-Studios artists working with communities, a retrospective exhibition activating our archive and our fifteen years of impact, alongside national and international partnerships to further enhance our growing profile and reputation.

8. Continue to ensure we understand the growing and evolving needs of 21st century artistic professionals, acknowledging the expectations and strategic ambitions of our major funders and stakeholders that artists deliver economic, tourism and other opportunities to the city.

9. Develop a policy around Commissioning and Artists Fees for exhibitions that reflects international best practice and adheres to VAI guidelines and supports the Arts Council's 'Paying the Artist' strategic ambitions for fair pay and conditions, while also staying true to our egalitarian approach to supporting artists at all stages of their careers with parity of esteem.

10. In the short term, ensure the ongoing professionalism of the space and improvements to the quality of the facilities which will allow artists to work comfortably and pursue ambitions within their practice.



Artistic Director Aoibhíe McCarthy with the Radical Institute at Studios of Sanctuary residents (L-R) Jerome Jefferson Kiyemba, Catarina Araújo, Selko Hayase and Neo Gilson.

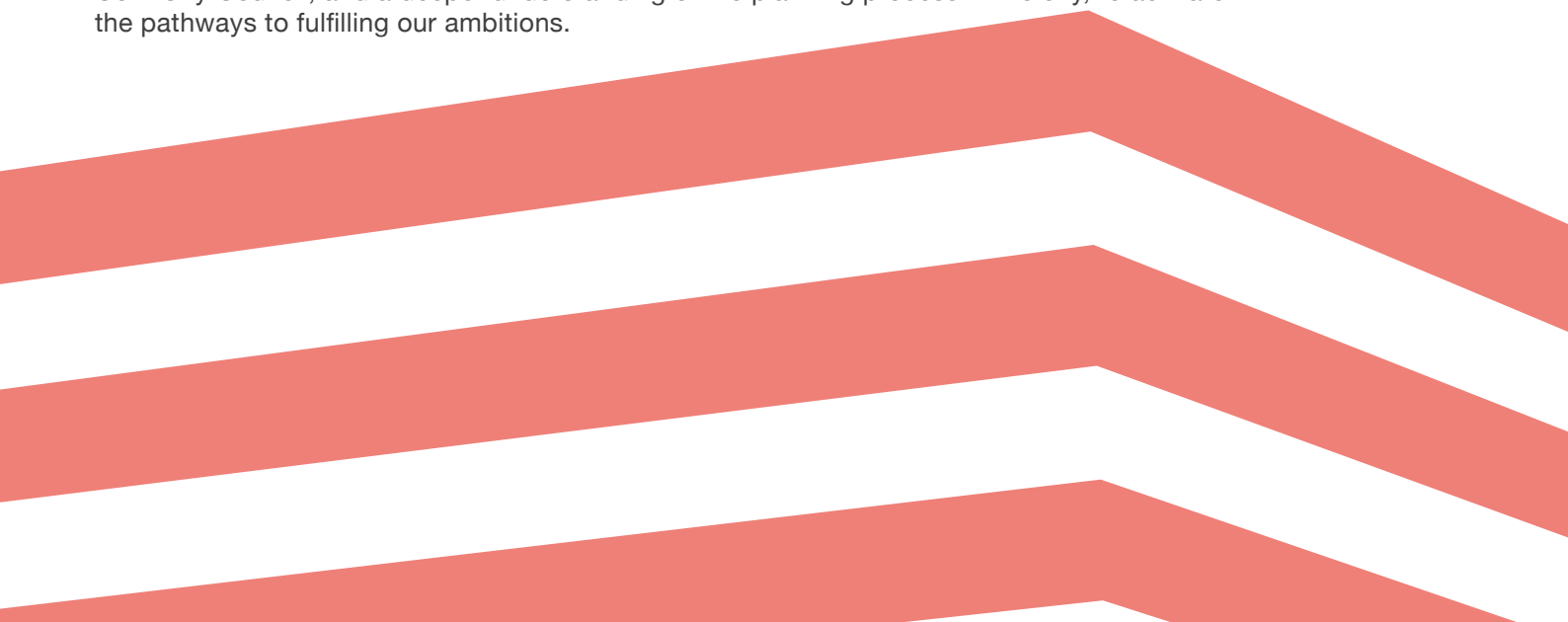
AUDIENCES & STAKEHOLDERS

Sample-Studios will continue making art accessible, as well as stimulating and educating our audiences on the ground through compelling and ambitious exhibitions programme, education programme and outreach activities. We will continue to do this in the coming five years by:

11. Growing the breadth of our audience in a sustainable and inclusive way through developing innovative and far-reaching partnerships with like-minded profile-raising organisations.
12. Becoming more effective communicators of what we do, through delivering a strategic Communications Plan, to be best in class at audience development and stakeholder engagement across the city. This will include the updating and streamlining of our brand identity.
13. Building capacity within the organisation executive to deliver on our goals, including further skills and resources in Marketing.
14. Equipping competent brand ambassadors for Sample-Studios, through communicating effectively to our members the importance of having pride in the Sample-Studios brand, and being champions for the organisation in the world.
15. In order to ensure access for as many audiences as possible, we will develop programmes that take down existing barriers, or offer multiple ways to engage.
16. Collaborate with schools from Primary level up, as well as young people outside of formal education in order to make confident cultural citizens for Cork. We want to expand our impact in the community through education and outreach programming.
17. Work with our champions in the Council and beyond to investigate the opportunity for a city centre space or hub to connect all artistic collectives in the city as a space to exhibit and make, a project space to make larger scale work or test ideas.

ORGANISATION

Sample-Studios will ensure it remains relevant and resourced into the future by focusing on robust governance, continued diversification of funding, and relentless pursuit of our goal to obtain a permanent and secure home for our members. We will do this in the coming five years by:

18. Researching and identifying the staffing model and income model we need to remain relevant and resourced. We will continue to expand our income generation through innovative partnerships with local, national and international organisations, sponsors and donors alongside improved staffing to support this output.
 19. Strengthening our advocacy work, we will map key networks across the city, identifying where we need stronger relationships, such as politically, or within the development and property sectors. This includes more in-depth strategic cross-departmental partnership with Cork City Council, and a deeper understanding of the planning process in the city, to activate the pathways to fulfilling our ambitions.
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20. We will pursue strategic partnerships with like-minded Third Level institutions, such as for project work around the research for our new building, for feasibility studies or business models, or as partners in evolving Cork as a City by Artists for Artists, through the development of a creative campus for artists.

21. As well as developing a blueprint or master plan for what our new building needs are, we will begin to identify and develop resource funds to underpin our advocacy for the implementation of the master plan.

22. We will consider the risks around our capacity to deliver effective and quality activities across multiple spaces, consolidating where possible to ensure we effectively deliver for all of our audiences. We will interrogate all opportunities to ensure they drive our mission forward, being forensic in considering risk, and whether to tolerate, treat or terminate.

23. Create a Steering Group comprising Board members who are suitably experienced in the areas of development and property sectors, along with external expertise, to support the stakeholder engagement work to secure an appropriate building for our future.

24. Create more formal links to industry in Cork, developing our offer and connecting artists to potential new supporters or patrons, including the implementation of a Fundraising Plan.

25. We will develop a succession plan for the Board, including job descriptions and a compelling call for applications, with the purpose of diversifying the Board and consolidating robust governance, processes, and processes.

IMPLEMENTATION

The Board of Sample-Studios is excited about the potential for the organisation in the coming three years, and commits to support the executive to deliver on the twenty five ambitions in our strategy.

Each of the five years will see an implementation plan for the year ahead, with targets for progress on the projects selected for progress. We commit to auditing progress at the end of each year, along with continuous measurement of impact.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Sample-Studios wishes to acknowledge the support of arts consultant Rowena Neville in facilitating our strategic planning process. We thank Cork City Council Arts Officer, Michelle Carew and Cork City Council Head of Economic Development, Seamus Coghlan for their insights and support in this process. We wish to thank our members who offered their crucial input and experience in developing our Strategy. We acknowledge the support of The Arts Council of Ireland in funding this development process through the Capacity Building Fund 2022 and in particular, we wish to thank the Visual Arts Team for their input and ongoing support.



Half Way to Falling installation in The Lord Mayor's Pavilion, March-May 2021



