

Kilkenny Arts Festival (KAF) Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Policy

Background: Kilkenny Arts Festival (KAF), established in 1974, has many long-standing and rich traditions, from volunteerism to excellence in International programming. As Ireland has evolved over the decades, KAF recognises the enormous shifts that have taken place over 51 iterations of the festival event. Some essential truths remain – that festival-making is people-centred; that place-making by definition is community-centred; and that artistic excellence is an endless pursuit. Our goal is to remove barriers to ease the path to artistic ambition and expression, to empower and support those who participate, and to ensure we reflect our own community in all its diversity.

Vision: As a leading multi-disciplinary arts festival in Ireland, KAF is dedicated to promoting equality, diversity, and inclusion. We recognise the transformative power of diversity in enriching the festival, the broader arts sector, and society as a whole. This policy outlines KAF's commitment to fostering an environment that is reflective of our widest community, supports the dignity of all individuals, and upholds principles of equality by creating a working and creative environment that is diverse, promotes positivity amongst staff and participants equally, regardless of their background or characteristics. We aim to ensure that KAF becomes an open and welcoming 'space' that shows leadership in its civic and national context.

Mission: KAF's core purpose is to present an annual ten-day event that promotes the appreciation, experience and understanding of the arts and artistic practice; through various artforms and multi-disciplinary work, the Festival delivers a wide and artistically diverse programme of events to the public and celebrates participation at every level.

Scope: This policy applies to all levels of the organisation, including staff, artists, creative personnel, contractors, crew, board members, volunteers, audience members, workshop participants and partners. It aims to create an inclusive culture at the Festival that respects and values diversity, ensuring that everyone has equal opportunities to participate and contribute and is free from prejudice.

Our understanding of EDI:

- **Equality:** Equality is the aimed outcome our commitment, where access to opportunities is equal, regardless of background or identity. Equity is not achieved without understanding that this is substantially different to equality. We recognise the real difference and will underpin our efforts with that understanding.
- **Diversity:** We recognise that a diversity of approaches, perspectives and practices is an enriching environment for festival-making. We recognise that a range of different lived experiences reflects society at large and can only heighten the opportunities and experiences for all who participate in KAF.
- **Inclusion:** The removal of barriers, real, physical or perceived, that have evolved in society, and particularly in some areas of artform traditional practice. An individual's experience of KAF must reflect the extent to which they feel valued and included.

Commitments:

- **Non-Discrimination:** The board and executive of Kilkenny Arts Festival when considering this policy, is cognisant of the commitments outlined in the Arts Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Implementation Plan 2023-2028, as well as existing equality legislation, including the Employment Equality and Equal Status Acts. As an employer and contractor of staff, creative personnel and artists Kilkenny Arts Festival will not discriminate or have any reservations based on the characteristics of; age, disability, race, religious beliefs, sex or gender including reassigned, sexual orientation, marriage status, pregnancy or membership of the traveller community.
- **Tailored Support:** We acknowledge that there is no "one size fits all" approach to inclusion. Aside from the nine grounds identified in the legislation, differences can also include visible and non-visible factors such as background, culture, accent or language. We also recognise that those identifiably as coming from marginalised communities are not defined solely by that community; and we recognise that society in its diversity includes many people from more than one community.
- **Courtesy, Dignity, Respect & Confidentiality:** We will ensure that every individual engaged with Kilkenny Arts Festival will be treated with respect, ensuring that all interactions are conducted with courtesy, sensitivity, confidentiality & acknowledgement of personal dignity.

Key Actions:

- **Communication:** We are committed to the use of welcoming and flexible language in all communications and as part of this policy will continue to tailor our engagement to include all levels of information accessibility.
- **Responsiveness:** We commit to being supportive to artists and collaborators in an appropriate and non-fixed way. We commit to building trust with participants about how their practice is valued when it doesn't conform to existing or historic patterns.
- **Quality:** We challenge conventional ideas of excellence, supporting those who push boundaries and innovate and bring a range of perspectives to the idea of excellence in the arts.

Ongoing Development: Our EDI policy is an active, evolving document, subject to regular review and improvement based on feedback from our community. The policy builds on work undertaken by the KAF team in recent years around accessibility in many areas including gender balance, different abilities, access, audience development, artistic remuneration and written marketing materials, as well as more recently implementing a programme strand to support members of the migrant communities in Kilkenny and a schools-based volunteer engagement programme.

Key Assessment Areas	Our Commitment
Artistic Planning & Engagement	Our programmes will reflect the diversity of the wider community and the richness of different cultures – it will strive to offer relevance to a wide audience, including targeted programmes and initiatives for marginalised groups. We commit to assessing artistic goals with a broad interpretation, respecting diverse creative practices.
Operational Integration	EDI principles will be embedded into all aspects of festival planning and execution of the Festival, including recruitment, board membership, partnerships, venue accessibility and ticket pricing. We will ensure equality, diversity & inclusivity in staff, casual/seasonal employees & volunteers. We also strive to provide EDI training for staff, and to brief casual employees & volunteers in the same way.
Audience and community engagement	We will proactively address barriers to engagement, offering broad access to our events using programme

	<p>engagement, direct engagement, ticket data, audience surveys and social media data as a basis for data led strategies where appropriate.</p> <p>As KAF operates in multiple adapted venues, where KAF is solely responsible for the event venue we will ensure access for all levels of mobility.</p> <p>Carers for audience members who may need assistance – mobility or otherwise - will be accommodated at events at no cost in order to remove attendance barriers.</p>
Staff Recruitment	<p>We will ensure our hiring practices are inclusive and reach a diverse talent pool allowing for reasonable accommodations at all parts of the process. When selecting for employment, contracting, promotion, training or any other engagement, Kilkenny Arts Festival will ensure that decisions are based on the individual’s own attitude, skills and potential at all times.</p>
Board Recruitment	<p>We strive for a board that reflects the community’s diversity in skills, experiences, and perspectives. Processes are inbuilt into board succession planning to ensure that the board reflects the wider community.</p>
Volunteer programme	<p>Our volunteer recruitment will be inclusive, engaging individuals from diverse backgrounds and providing training/briefing on EDI principles. Beginning in 2024, recruitment to the junior volunteer programme began in local schools in order to accurately reflect society and community in Kilkenny City – this will form a major part of ensuring an inclusive invitation to become part of KAF from a younger age.</p>
Venue Managers	<p>Venue Managers will be briefed on our EDI policy, ensuring they support diverse audiences and volunteers effectively.</p>
Staff Training	<p>Comprehensive EDI training will be provided for all staff and contractors, reinforcing our commitment to these principles.</p>
Marketing and PR	<p>Public-facing materials will visibly reflect the diversity of our programme, with an annual audit of accessibility</p>

	in our digital & print marketing materials. QR Codes will be used to enhance information accessibility.
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Conclusion: The Festival will be explicit (through its staff/contractor handbook, event plan and briefings) that everyone will be treated fairly, with respect and will be given equal opportunities in every aspect of their role with the Festival. Its briefing handbook and event plan will name a designated person with whom grievances can be raised both formally and informally. The Festival will be equally explicit in its programme of events and activities that boundaries and exclusion are anathema to artistic expression.

The Festival will:

- Establish mechanisms for ongoing monitoring and reporting on EDI progress, and ensure an ongoing commitment to continuous improvement by actively seeking feedback from our audience, artists, partners, staff, participants and volunteers.
- Commit to regular internal or external audits to assess our EDI performance.
- Ensure disciplinary action will be taken in the case of staff or contractor breaches of our EDI policy and remedial action will be taken with all other participants as necessary.

Bibliography:

Arts Council - Equality, Human Rights and Diversity Policy

<https://www.artscouncil.ie/equality-human-rights-diversity/>

Arts Council - Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Implementation Plan

<https://www.artscouncil.ie/News/Arts-Council-launches-new-Equality,-Diversity-and-Inclusion-Implementation-Plan/>

Employment Equality and Equal Status Acts

https://www.workplacerelations.ie/en/what_you_should_know/equal-status-and-employment-equality/employment%20equality%20and%20equal%20status/