

Creative Climate Change II

Evaluating the Impact of the Creative Climate Action Fund II: Agents of Change Initiative on Climate Change Engagement, Action & Behaviour Change in Ireland

Policy Brief

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Further reading:

- Mac Mahon, J., Revez, A., Burke, M., Hogan, P., & Nyhan, M. M. (2025). Arts, creative & cultural initiatives for citizen engagement on climate action: Insights from Ireland's Creative Climate Action Fund. *Current Research in Environmental Sustainability*, 9, 100274.
- Nyhan, M., Revez, A., Mac Mahon, J., Burke, M. and Hogan, P. (2023). Creative C-Change - Analysing the Impact of the Creative Climate Action Initiative on Climate Change Awareness, Engagement & Action in Ireland. University College Cork.
- Nyhan, M., Mac Mahon, J., Burke, M. and Lydon, M. (2025). Creative Climate Change II - Analysing the Impact of the Creative Climate Action II: Agents of Change Initiative on Climate Change Engagement, Action and Behaviour Change in Ireland – Report Year One. University College Cork.

Front cover photo: Wilderland. Image by Elaine Harrington

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Executive Summary

This Creative Climate Change policy brief presents key insights and learnings from University College Cork's engagement with six Creative Ireland-funded *Creative Climate Action* projects. The six projects are funded as part of *Creative Climate Action Fund II: Agents of Change* initiative, which supports creative, cultural and artistic projects that build awareness around climate change and empowers citizens to foster meaningful behavioural changes. The projects assessed are Creative Boardroom: Collaborate4Climate; Creating a Climate for Change in Limerick – Dance Limerick; Dublin City Sustainable Energy Communities – From Plan to Do; Field Exchange; The Air We Share; and The Eco-Makers Workshop.

The analysis of these six projects found that arts, culture and creativity can be powerful catalysts of climate action. The creative nature of the projects was fundamental in bringing multiple stakeholders and actors across all levels of society together in active and collaborative sustainability dialogue and engagement. By connecting with participants on a deep emotional level, the creative elements of the projects were found to provide a unique inspirational frame that motivated people to adopt and pursue further sustainable actions. Project activities were found to inspire and motivate participants through a sense of fun, awe and enjoyment. Participants felt more confident and empowered to take climate action, as well as a greater sense of collective efficacy through partaking in group activities such as practical workshops, co-creation of artworks and co-design events. *Creative Climate Action* participants were also found to gain new perspectives, knowledge and skills from the artists and creative facilitators, thereby enhancing their understanding of the issues and increasing their capacity to take meaningful actions. Participant engagement in the *Creative Climate Action* programme was achieved by engaging people on cognitive, emotional and practical levels.

The projects assessed were found to deliver interventions which progress Ireland's *Climate Action Plan*. We found that the projects fostered social dialogue that empowered citizens, communities, businesses and organisations to pursue effective climate action. Through

artistic and creative initiatives, the projects also equipped people with the skills, knowledge and affirmative mindset required to participate in and benefit from Ireland's future net-zero economy.

A key principle of the *Climate Action Plan*'s just transition framework is to ensure that social dialogue on climate action is representative across all Irish society. The National Dialogue on Climate Action (NDCA) is a key mechanism for facilitating this process at local and national levels. Our analysis of the *Creative Climate Action* projects found them to be highly successful interventions that supported equity, social inclusion, and a just transition. The projects recognised that everyone is not the same and provided nuanced resources to communicate and engage participants in climate action in an inclusive manner.

In our thematic analysis of participant interviews and researcher observations, we found that the formation of novel spaces was a significant factor in the effectiveness of the projects' interventions. This refers to the unique creative and social spaces provided by the projects that helped to foster greater social investment in climate action. The novel spaces enhanced social connection, dialogue, co-generation of solutions and knowledge sharing through creative activities, thereby demonstrating the power of collaboration to participants and increasing their collective ability to pursue climate action. The effectiveness of these spaces assured a sustained degree of local and community engagement, with participants noting a sense of pride and ownership that helped to boost meaningful engagement with their local *Creative Climate Action* initiative. We also found that these initiatives helped to build capacity and know-how which are essential for developing low carbon communities.



Field Exchange. Image by Michelle Burke

The importance of effective and trusted communicators for engaging participants in *Creative Climate Action* projects was a major theme in our analysis. 'Creatives as mediators' refers to the creative personnel, project team members, and facilitators who made information about climate change and sustainability topics clear, relatable and accessible for their cohorts. By successfully connecting to the cohorts' local identities, place, values, levels of awareness and understanding, they ensured a greater level of engagement. The projects also effectively coupled creative initiatives with insights from trusted messengers such as expert speakers and community figures, assuring greater trust in the climate change and sustainability communications.

Importantly, we also found that the projects cultivated a sense of connection to nature and the environment, thereby motivating participants to apply ecologically sound practices which can help to protect biodiversity and the environment.

This policy brief is also based upon preliminary insights from a *Creative Climate Action* post-experience survey which was designed to provide insight into respondents' underlying perceptions and behaviours in relation to climate change. We found that participants overwhelmingly asserted increased motivation and capacity to take climate action and make changes to their behaviour or lifestyle after attending an event or participating in a project. Over three-quarters of participants felt empowered and supported to take practical actions on environmental, climate change and/or sustainability issues. Two-thirds

of people who attended the projects in a work capacity acknowledged that the experience gave them additional skills and knowledge to enable them to make practical environmentally sustainable changes in their own work, business or organisation. This shows the importance of *Creative Climate Action* initiatives in not only increasing motivation and building capacity for enabling lower-carbon communities, but also to supporting businesses and organisations in their respective transitions to more sustainable models.

In our assessment of the first *Creative Climate Action Fund*, we noted that 'it is essential to recognise the significant potential of the arts and cultural sector in fostering new and alternative responses to climate change action'. This policy brief reinforces this conclusion further, with our findings demonstrating that arts and creativity can be significant catalysts of climate action and an essential means by which the Government can deliver on key aspects of the *Climate Action Plan*. It is evident from our current evaluation that the arts and creative sectors have significant power as transformative *agents of change* to help foster innovative and locally relevant responses to climate change action.



The Eco-Makers Workshop. Image by AK Inspired Ability

1. Introduction

The Creative Ireland Programme, based in the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sports and Media, is an all-of-government initiative which places creativity at the centre of public policy. The core proposition is that participation in cultural and creative activity promotes individual, community and national wellbeing. In 2021, the *Creative Climate Action Fund* was launched by Creative Ireland through a collaboration with the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications. This funded fifteen creative and cultural projects that aimed to meaningfully connect people with the profound changes that are happening because of climate change and transform that connection into climate action. In 2022, the *Creative Climate Action Fund II: Agents of Change* initiative was launched, funded by the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media in collaboration with the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications and the Department of the Taoiseach.



The *Agents of Change* initiative paired creative minds with experts in climate science, sustainability and biodiversity, and supported 42 projects under two strands: Strand 1, Ignite, and Strand 2, Spark. The Ignite strand supported 19 large-scale interdisciplinary projects with extensive public engagement on a national level, with some of these running into 2025. Three Ignite projects, funded under the Shared Island Initiative and the Department of the Taoiseach, brought people together to take actionable measures around common concerns that would benefit the whole island of Ireland. The Spark strand funded 23 projects which lasted 12 months, to pilot new ideas for public engagement at a local, community, or community-of-practice scale. These were completed by the end of 2024. The projects assessed in this policy brief include three Ignite projects, Creative Boardroom: Collaborate4Climate, Field Exchange and The Air We Share, and three Spark projects, namely Creating a Climate for Change in Limerick – Dance Limerick, Dublin City Sustainable Energy Communities – From Plan to Do and The Eco-Makers Workshop.






Creative Boardroom: Collaborate4Climate exhibition. Image by Leon Farrell/Photocall Ireland

2.Key Findings

This section includes key findings from our evaluation of *Creative Climate Action Fund II: Agents of Change*. The research aimed to understand the role of the arts, cultural and creative sectors in supporting climate action and the just transition towards a sustainable and net-zero future in Ireland. In 2024, five of our researchers attended 25 *Creative Climate Action* events hosted by the six selected ‘deep dive’ projects. Data was collected through 90 *Creative Climate Action* experience surveys, 42 interviews and 25 participant observations. The following summarises the key findings from the data analyses.

Key Findings:	
<div>Arts and Creativity - Catalysts of Climate Action</div> <div></div>	<p>Art and creativity provided a unique inspirational frame to take climate action by connecting with participants on a deep personal and emotional level.</p> <p>The artistic and creative aspects of the projects proved vital in uniting stakeholders across society in impactful climate and sustainability efforts.</p>
<div>Climate Action Plan</div> <div></div>	<p>The initiative delivered on key aspects of the Government's <i>Climate Action Plan</i> through inclusive engagement of participants in climate action at national, regional and community levels.</p> <p>The projects engaged diverse audiences through thoughtful, original and creative communications. They showcased exemplars and built capacity for community-led climate action.</p>



Key Findings:	
<div>Just Transition</div> <div></div>	<p>The projects supported equity, social inclusion, and the just transition by tailoring their approach to participants' capacity, needs, abilities, and climate awareness.</p> <p>Targeted socially inclusive approaches achieved high levels of engagement, increased understanding, and increased uptake and motivation to adopt climate compatible behaviours.</p>
<div>Novel Spaces</div> <div></div>	<p>The initiative generated unique creative and social spaces that fostered greater social investment in climate action.</p> <p>The novel spaces enabled enhanced dialogue, social connection, knowledge-sharing, learning, collaboration and positive feedback mechanisms. The sharing of successful climate action initiatives renewed participants' motivation to adopt climate compatible behaviour.</p>
<div>Community and Organisational Engagement</div> <div></div>	<p><i>Creative Climate Action</i> initiatives fostered community pride and ownership, thereby increasing engagement and motivation for further climate action. The fund also built capacity and expertise for developing low-carbon communities.</p> <p><i>Creative Climate Action</i> initiatives supported businesses and organisations in their respective transitions to more sustainable models. The artistic and creative nature of the projects equipped people with the skills and knowledge necessary to participate in and benefit from the future net-zero economy.</p>

Key Findings:	
<div>Creatives as Mediators and Trusted Messengers</div> <div></div>	<p>Creatives and project team members proved to be highly effective mediators who delivered information about climate change and sustainability in a clear, relatable and accessible manner.</p> <p>To engage stakeholders effectively, projects relied on trusted figures including expert speakers and community leaders in climate action discussions.</p>
<div>Nature and the Environment</div> <div></div>	<p><i>Creative Climate Action</i> experiences cultivated and enhanced a sense of connection to nature, thereby motivating participants to apply ecologically sound practices that help protect biodiversity and the environment. Nature-related activities were important for engaging wider audiences.</p> <p>These activities enhanced a sense of physical and mental wellbeing among participants. This was particularly effective in addressing the needs of marginalised and underrepresented groups, where ensuring their sense of wellbeing was critical for engagement while also helping to build their resilience. Co-benefits generated by the activities, such as enhanced wellbeing, are important for engaging people in climate action.</p>
<div>Motivation and Capacity to Act</div> <div></div>	<p>Participants overwhelmingly asserted intentions to take climate action or make changes to their behaviour or lifestyle after attending an event or participating in a project.</p> <p>A wide range of participants, including business owners, people from marginalised groups and local communities felt empowered and supported to take practical actions on environmental, climate and/or sustainability issues.</p>
<div>Funding</div> <div></div>	<p>Our assessment found that the short-term nature of the current <i>Creative Climate Action</i> funding model (1-2 years) was an obstacle to long-term impact.</p> <p>Short-term contracts hindered projects' ability to attract talented individuals to key roles. The momentum built by the initiatives waned due to the project funding ending.</p>

Table 1: Key findings from evaluation of Creative Climate Action Fund II: Agents of Change



The Air We Share. Image by Ciarán MacChoncarraige

3. Recommendations

This section includes key recommendations from our evaluation of *Creative Climate Action Fund II: Agents of Change*.

Creative Climate Action delivers key aspects of the Climate Action Plan

- We recommend that the Government continue to fund Creative Ireland's *Creative Climate Action Fund* initiative. This will enable Creative Ireland to build on its success of effectively supporting Ireland's *Climate Action Plan*, especially the Citizen Engagement and Just Transition elements of it.
- All future projects funded as part of a *Creative Climate Action Fund* initiative should integrate a Citizen Engagement Plan into their objectives. Creative Ireland should provide clear guidance on its implementation.

Leverage the power of arts and creativity

- We recommend that participatory arts, creative and cultural interventions should be encouraged to engage citizens in climate action, as they connect with people on deep personal and practical levels.
- The implementation of bespoke, creative and participatory arts-based interventions that connect with marginalised and underserved groups should be recognised as an essential aid in the just transition.
- Artists and creative practitioners should be actively supported to participate in future climate and sustainability interventions in order to facilitate communication and understanding of relevant issues.

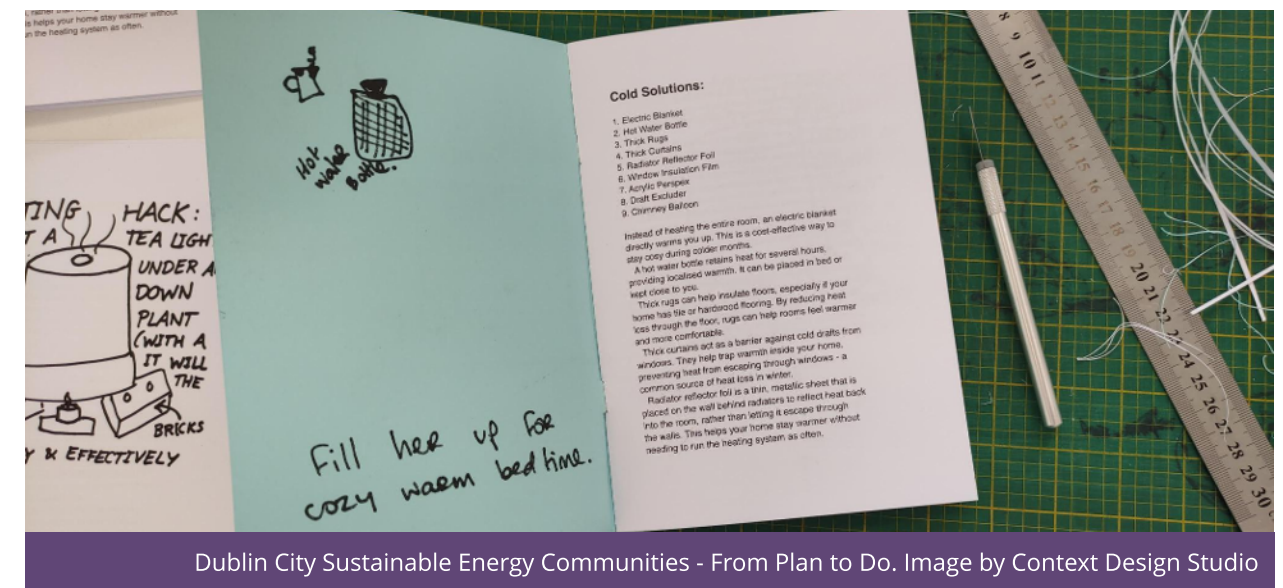
- We recommend the promotion of group activities that involve participatory arts, co-design and co-creation methods to help increase individuals' and communities' sense of efficacy, social investment and motivation to take climate and pro-environmental actions.
- Businesses and organisations should be encouraged to consider the effectiveness of the *Creative Climate Action Fund*, which has demonstrated how arts, culture and creativity can be key drivers in building capacity to achieve a net-zero transition.

Longer term funding needed

- While the *Creative Climate Action Fund II* enables meaningful engagement, we recommend a revision of the current one- and two-year funding model. To enable long-term impact, funding bodies should move away from short-term investments that hinder project stability.
- When implementing funding strategies, Government Departments and agencies should consider the ability of a project to attract skilled professionals when implementing funding strategies. A long-term funding model (3-5 years) would support commitment to project goals, while also strengthening teams and empowering participants.

Leverage local authorities and collective action

- We recommend that all 31 local authorities implement participatory arts, creativity and cultural interventions on climate change in order to raise community engagement and inspire collective responses.



Dublin City Sustainable Energy Communities - From Plan to Do. Image by Context Design Studio



Room with a View. Image by Cracking Light Productions

"I certainly believe that the arts, and the creative part of our society has a huge role to play. For years we've been kind of waiting for the arts to come in, for the media to come in, for the whole area of music, which can be so powerful. Drama, film. I think it can be transforming. It can help people to get the message in a way that we don't seem to be getting it."

- *Creative Climate Action* participant