

Creative Ireland Shared Island

Evaluation Report

March 2026



Shared Island
Initiative

Clár Éire Ildánach
Creative Ireland
Programme



Creative Ireland
Programme 2023-2027

Shared Understanding

Contents

1.	Executive Summary	2
2.	Introduction - The Ambition of a Shared Island	8
3.	Purpose, Scope and Progress of The Evaluation	18
4.	Cross-Cutting Findings - The Shared Story of Collaboration	24
5.	Pillar-Specific Analysis - How The Creative Ireland Shared Island Story Plays Out	54
6.	Evaluation Insights - The Impact of All-Island Creative Collaboration	68
7.	Recommendations - Lessons for Future Iterations of All-Island Creative Funding	74
8.	Project Guidance - Considerations for Future Shared Island Projects	80
9.	Appendices	98

1. Executive Summary



Pic: *Creative Boardroom: Collaborate4Climate*
(Creative Climate Action Fund II - Agents for Change)



Shared Vision

1. Executive Summary

“The Government’s Shared Island initiative aims to harness the full potential of the Good Friday Agreement to enhance cooperation, connection and mutual understanding on the island and engage with all communities and traditions to build consensus around a shared future.”

Launched at the end of 2022, Creative Ireland’s Shared Island initiative has provided funding to 47 projects across the island of Ireland, with the goal of using creativity to foster person-to-person and community-to-community relationships which can contribute to a new vision of a shared island.

Funding was provided under the pillars of Creative Communities, Cruinniú na nÓg, Creative Climate Action and Sustainability, Creative Youth, and Creative Health and Wellbeing, for projects which provide opportunities for broad inclusion and participation

in creative and cultural initiatives, fostering cross-community engagement, mutual understanding and collective wellbeing on an all-island basis.

The interim version of this report was launched at the Creative Ireland Shared Island Conference - Creativity Connecting People, on November 13th, 2025. This updated, final version of the report introduces a new chapter offering project-level guidance for future funded projects based on lessons learned and incorporating further findings from project evaluations that have since been published.

The Big Picture - Key Cross-Cutting Insights Emerging from the Evaluation.

This section presents findings under the three evaluation objectives.

Evaluation Objective 1 – How did the initiative foster cooperation, connection, and mutual understanding across the island of Ireland?

The evidence gathered highlights how creativity serves as a powerful and multifaceted tool for dialogue by creating safe, accessible, and non-confrontational spaces where diverse groups can connect, share experiences, and build mutual understanding.

Interviews suggest that creative projects effectively facilitate communication and understanding across cultural and political divides. Although approaches were varied, each project sought to facilitate a sequence of carefully and thoughtfully designed experiences where participants were empowered to engage, learn, share, connect, and evolve their shared and individual perspectives on what it means to live on a shared island.

While specific art forms vary widely across music, songwriting, visual arts, crafts, dance, youth circus, and creative writing, the underlying principle of using creativity as a vehicle for connection is common across all projects, with evidence of its use in transcending barriers and creating common ground, facilitating personal expression and vulnerability, and building relationships and fostering empathy.

"..a new vision of a shared island"

Evaluation Objective 2 – How did the initiative contribute to social cohesion, cultural exchange, and the development of social capital among participants?

The projects¹ used a diverse range of strategies and approaches to engage communities, adapting their methods to suit specific contexts, target groups, and geographical locations.

These approaches can be grouped into several key themes. These include:

- Leveraging strategic partnerships,
- Using creativity as a primary engagement tool,
- Implementing structured and gradual interaction, and
- Being highly adaptive and responsive to participant needs.

All-island collaboration on creative projects presents significant administrative hurdles including differing regulations, all-island travel arrangements, currency exchange, cultural differences, and Brexit/ Covid-19 impacts. Resource disparities between Northern Ireland and Ireland create additional barriers, while personnel changes within partner organisations add complexity.

The complexities of all-island projects required crafting methodologies that adapt to diverse participant needs and the practical challenges of working across jurisdictions. This often resulted in underestimated project administration. The collaborative engagement between Creative Ireland and project teams was crucial for adapting participant-led and co-designed approaches.

The valuable, practical knowledge developed by project teams and facilitators on running all-island projects, covering topics like currency, tax, and travel, should be consolidated into up-front information for future applicants to improve project scoping.

Finally, current projects should be documented as case studies to offer future project teams insights into accessible and inclusive project design, delivery, and evaluation.

1 See Appendix A for full details

Evaluation Objective 3 – What evidence-based recommendations can guide subsequent iterations of all-island creative funding schemes?

Concerns around achieving long-term impact (at participant, community and policy-level) within project timescales, combined with the logistical challenges associated with all-island working, suggest that future programmes may benefit from knowledge sharing structures, strengthened scoping at application stage, and the potential for up to three year funding.

There is a significant appetite to share learnings and approaches across projects. The complexity of creative, all-island work means that there are extensive lessons to be shared but the adaptability of the Creative Ireland Shared Island initiative is a key characteristic that allows project teams to respond to emerging and changing needs of participants.

The overall impact of projects was largely aided by the duration of funding, which allowed project teams to be ambitious and forge new relationships. The time required for relationships to develop within and between communities meant that maximum impact potential often emerged late, suggesting a need for further funding to sustain or expand projects.

To address this, it is recommended to establish a minimum funding period of at least two years, potentially extending to three years to ensure sustainable participation. Additionally, the existing funding disparities between Ireland and Northern Ireland that led to an imbalance in creative capacity and partner engagement must be recognised and addressed during the project application stage, ensuring that planned impact aligns with the practical realities of these constraints.

Summary Insights

Overall, the evaluation indicates that the Creative Ireland Shared Island initiative provides a unique all-island mechanism for creative and cultural participation which has the potential to deliver long-term impact at participant, community and policy levels.

The diverse range of projects, with their unique processes, participants, and outcomes, demonstrates the initiative's potential to foster positive change by using creativity as a unifying force, strengthening partnerships, ensuring inclusion across communities, and providing rehearsal spaces for new societal visions.

2. Introduction - The Ambition of a Shared Island



Pic: *Circus Explored (Cruinniú na nÓg)*

Shared Ambition



2. Introduction - The Ambition of a Shared Island

The ambition of the Government of Ireland's Shared Island initiative is to foster increased cooperation between Northern Ireland and Ireland across various sectors, with a focus on economic, social, and environmental dimensions.

This initiative is particularly significant in the context of post-Brexit challenges and opportunities, aiming to enhance the quality of life and economic prospects on the island of Ireland. The initiative seeks to address disparities and leverage shared opportunities to create a more cohesive and prosperous island.

Overview of the Creative Ireland Programme

Creative Ireland is an all-of-government culture and wellbeing programme that embeds creativity across national and local governance structures.

The strategic vision of the Creative Ireland programme is to put creativity at the heart of public policy to enable every person in Ireland the opportunity to realise their creative potential.

Working through the pillars of Creative Communities, Creative Climate Action and Sustainability, Creative Youth, Creative Health and Wellbeing, and Creative Industries, the Creative Ireland mission is to act as a catalyst for policy and systems change in the public sector to access and harness our creative potential.

"Creativity is how we connect"

The core values of the Creative Ireland Programme are:

Creativity - To encourage ourselves, and others, to think differently, to try things out, to be innovative, to be solutions-focused.

Collaboration - To harness the power and creative potential of people, organisations and government departments working together, sharing expertise, to catalyse ideas and action.

Transformation - To believe in the transformative power of creativity and consider Creative Ireland to be a catalyst for positive change.

Creative Ireland's Strategic Goals are to establish practice and participation, promote understanding of the value of creativity, measure impact and build evidence and embed creativity in public policy.

Through partnerships with local and national government, cultural and enterprise agencies and local enterprise, the Creative Ireland programme creates pathways and opportunities for people and communities to unlock their creative potential.

Creative Ireland Shared Island Programme

In 2022 the Creative Ireland Programme was allocated €6 million over three years (2023-25) to invest in creative initiatives under the Government's Shared Island initiative. 2023 marked the first year of Creative Ireland's participation in the Shared Island initiative, which aims to harness the full potential of the Good Friday Agreement to enhance cooperation, connection and mutual understanding on the island and engage with all communities and traditions to build consensus around a shared future.

The Shared Island dimension to the Creative Ireland Programme sought to deploy creativity on a shared island basis to:

- Increase opportunities for cross-community cultural and creative initiatives between children and young people,
- Support local authorities to enhance networks of creativity in support of vibrant and inclusive people-to-people and community-to-community partnerships,
- Position Ireland as a global leader in demonstrating the value of creativity and mental health including in post-conflict societies, and
- Deepen collaborations for a more environmentally and socially sustainable island.

Shared Island funding was allocated to projects under the following calls:

- Creative Communities on a Shared Island,
- Cruinniú na nÓg,
- Creative Climate Action Fund II: Agents of Change,
- Creative Youth on a Shared Island, and
- Creative Health and Wellbeing in the Community.

A total of 22 Creative Ireland Shared Island projects have been included in this evaluation; the full list of all projects awarded funding is available at Appendix B.

Figure 1: About the Creative Ireland Shared Island funds



Creative Communities on a Shared Island

Creative Communities on a Shared Island was an initiative for local authority Culture and Creativity Teams to support collaborations utilising all-island networks in support of cultural and creative people-to-people and community-to-community opportunities. The initiative opened in May 2023 and successful projects ran from September 2023 until 2025.

- Fund opened: May 2023
- Projects run: June 2023 until December 2025
- Who could apply: The 31 Local Authorities + 1 or more other partners in Northern Ireland
- Number of projects included in this evaluation: 8

Cruinniú na nÓg

In 2023, a Shared Island element was introduced to the already existing Cruinniú na nÓg programme to expand the capacity for peer-to-peer, cross-community cultural and creative initiatives between children and young people. In 2023 and 2024, three all-island Strategic Partners were engaged, and in a further development in 2024 and 2025, local authorities were invited to submit expressions of interest to deliver Cruinniú na nÓg events on a Shared Island basis, representing a diverse mix of organisations, locations, project audiences and creative approaches.

- Funding for Shared Island element: 2023, 2024, and 2025
- Projects run: annually
- Who could apply: n/a
- Number of Strategic Partners included in this evaluation: 1

Creative Climate Action Fund II: Agents of Change

The Creative Climate Action Fund II: Agents of Change supported imaginative creative projects that sought to build awareness around climate change and empower citizens to make meaningful behavioural changes. Within the initiative, separate Shared Island funding has been made available for projects that support shared island initiatives.

- Fund opened: December 2022
- Projects run: Summer 2023 - end 2025
- Who could apply: Applicants across the arts, cultural and creative sectors with a lead in Ireland and a named partner in Northern Ireland
- Number of projects included in this evaluation: 3

Creative Health and Wellbeing in the Community

To demonstrate how creativity, be it through performance, visual arts, culture, and heritage-based activities, promotes positive health and wellbeing by: helping people to connect socially; enhancing their self-esteem and resilience; enabling recovery; and empowering them to manage their own health and wellbeing through their lives.

- Fund opened: February 2024
- Projects run: 2024 - 2025 (2 x 1 year funds)
- Who could apply: Within Strand B (Shared Island), Local Authorities (Creative Ireland and Healthy Ireland teams) in Ireland with Northern Ireland partner organisations.
- Number of projects included in this evaluation: 4

Creative Youth on a Shared Island

The Creative Youth on a Shared Island funding scheme sought to reach children and young people across the island of Ireland. The aim was to harness the experience and expertise of organisations working in the creative, cultural, arts, community and youth sectors to engage young people. This approach also sought to bring children and young people together to nurture a sense of collaboration, understanding and hope for the future, through a creative medium.

- Fund opened: January 2024
- Projects run: June 2024 - December 2025
- Who could apply: A North South partnership of organisations in creative, cultural, arts, community and youth sectors (not schools).
- Number of projects included in this evaluation: 6

Creative Communities

Table 1: Creative Communities Projects

Project Name	Lead Partner	Amount Funded	Locations
<i>Dance Connects in Rural Border Regions</i>	Cavan County Council	€250,000	Cavan, Monaghan, Fermanagh, Omagh
<i>Birds of a Feather</i>	Clare County Council	€250,000	Ennis, Ballinasloe, Innisbofin, Belfast
<i>Farm Walks</i>	Leitrim County Council	€153,000	Leitrim, Fermanagh
<i>The Ties That Bind</i>	Cork County Council	€63,000	Ballydehob, Belfast
<i>Building Shared Creative Communities</i>	Waterford City and County Council	€60,000	Waterford, Antrim
<i>Laces of Ireland</i>	Limerick City and County Council	€50,000	Limerick, South Armagh, Cork
<i>Shared Histories</i>	Donegal County Council	€50,000	Derry, Donegal, Louth
<i>Sharing Songs and Unforgettable Voices</i>	Fingal County Council	€50,000	Dublin, Antrim, Down

Cruinniú na nÓg

Table 2: Cruinniú na nÓg Project

Project Name	Lead Partner	Amount Funded	Locations
<i>Circus Explored</i>	Irish Street Arts, Circus and Spectacle Network	€388,655	Galway, Dublin, Tipperary, Cork, Derry, Belfast

Creative Climate Action and Sustainability

Table 3: Creative Climate Action and Sustainability Projects

Project Name	Lead Partner	Amount Funded	Locations
<i>Divergently Together</i>	Dublin City University and Insight Centre DCU	€303,465	Laois, Cavan, Fermanagh, Waterford, Galway, Dublin
<i>Shifting Tides and Sea Change: Creative Coastal Conversations</i>	The Wheel and NICVA	€230,462	Rostrevor, Carlingford, Warrenpoint, Omeath, Greenore
<i>Creative Boardroom: Collaborate4Climate.</i>	NCAD	€470,000	Dublin, Belfast

Creative Youth

Table 4: Creative Youth Projects

Project Name	Lead Partner	Amount Funded	Locations
<i>To the Power of Three</i>	Tallaght Community Arts	€170,500	Derry, Dublin and Wexford
<i>Isle of Song</i>	Music Generation Laois	€180,000	Laois, Offaly, and across Northern Ireland
<i>Living Legends: A Cross-Border Cultural Exchange of Stories, Myth and Landscape</i>	Narrative 4	€180,000	Antrim, Aran Islands
<i>Future Parade</i>	Macnas	€180,000	Belfast, Galway
<i>Shared Lived Experience Through Creative Arts</i>	Extern NI	€179,612	Belfast, Dublin
<i>Creative Connections - Shared Writing Across the Island</i>	Fighting Words	€180,000	Belfast, Dublin, Cork, Armagh, Monaghan, Down, Louth

Creative Health and Wellbeing

Table 5: Creative Health and Wellbeing Projects

Project Name	Lead Partner	Amount Funded	Locations
<i>Creative Cafés</i>	Monaghan County Council	€104,000	Monaghan and Fermanagh
<i>Weaving Worlds Together</i>	Kerry County Council	€132,000	Ballyheigue, Listowel, Kenmare, Belfast, Omagh, South Armagh, Killeel
<i>The Art of Life</i>	Cavan County Council	€155,758	Cavan, Fermanagh, Tyrone
<i>'Dear Future Me' - Promoting Positive Mental Health Through Creative Expression On Our Shared Island</i>	Louth County Council	€140,000	Louth, Down

Figure 2: Spatial Profile of the Funded Projects

Creative Ireland on a Shared Island

This map displays the geographic distribution of Creative Ireland-funded projects across the island of Ireland, grouped by the five Creative Ireland Shared Island funding frameworks. Each circle represents the location of a project lead or project partner. In urban areas there is overlap of dots due to multiple partners in these locations:

Creative Ireland Shared Island Funds

- Creative Communities
- Cruinniú na nÓg
- Creative Climate Action
- Creative Youth
- Creative Health and Wellbeing

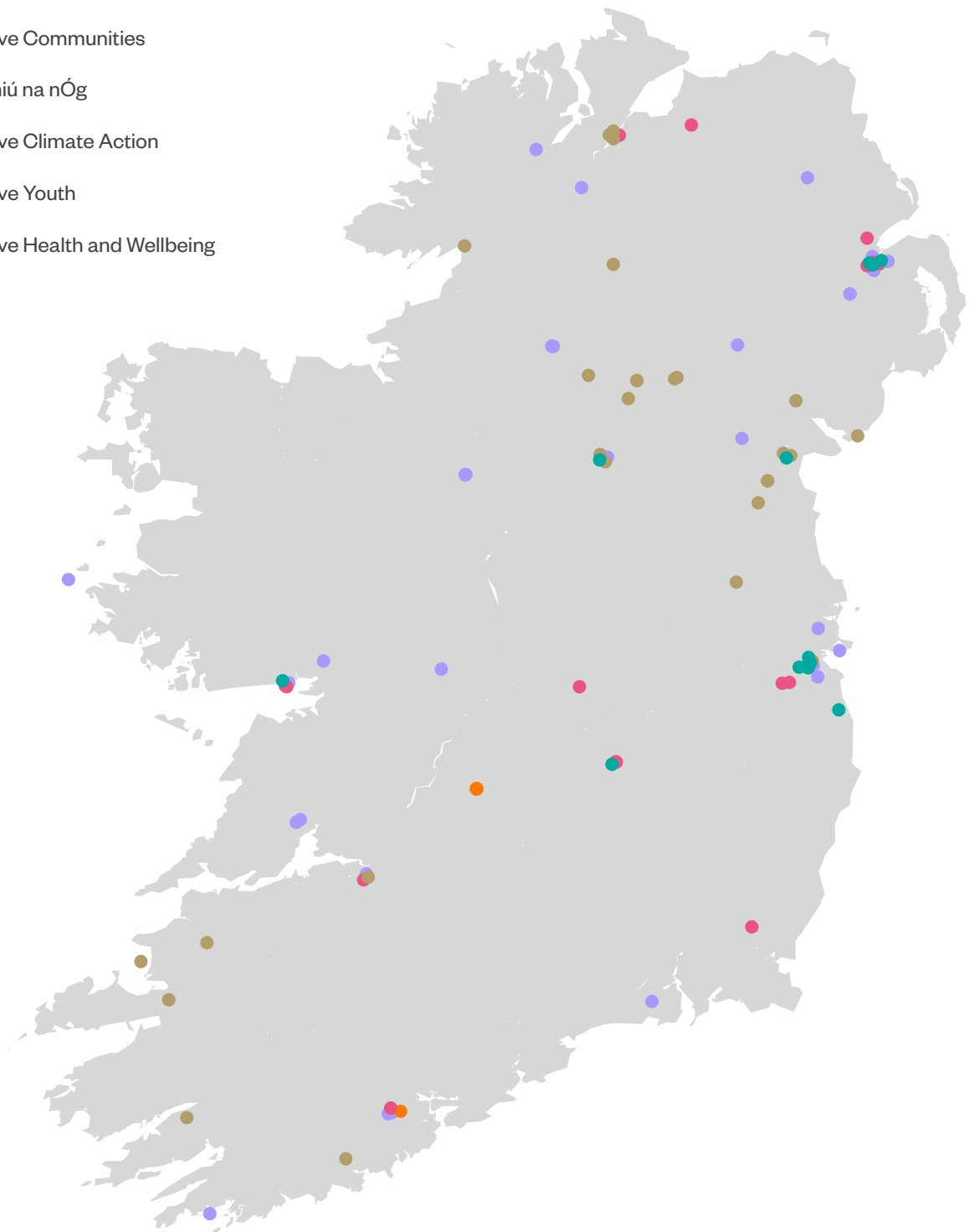
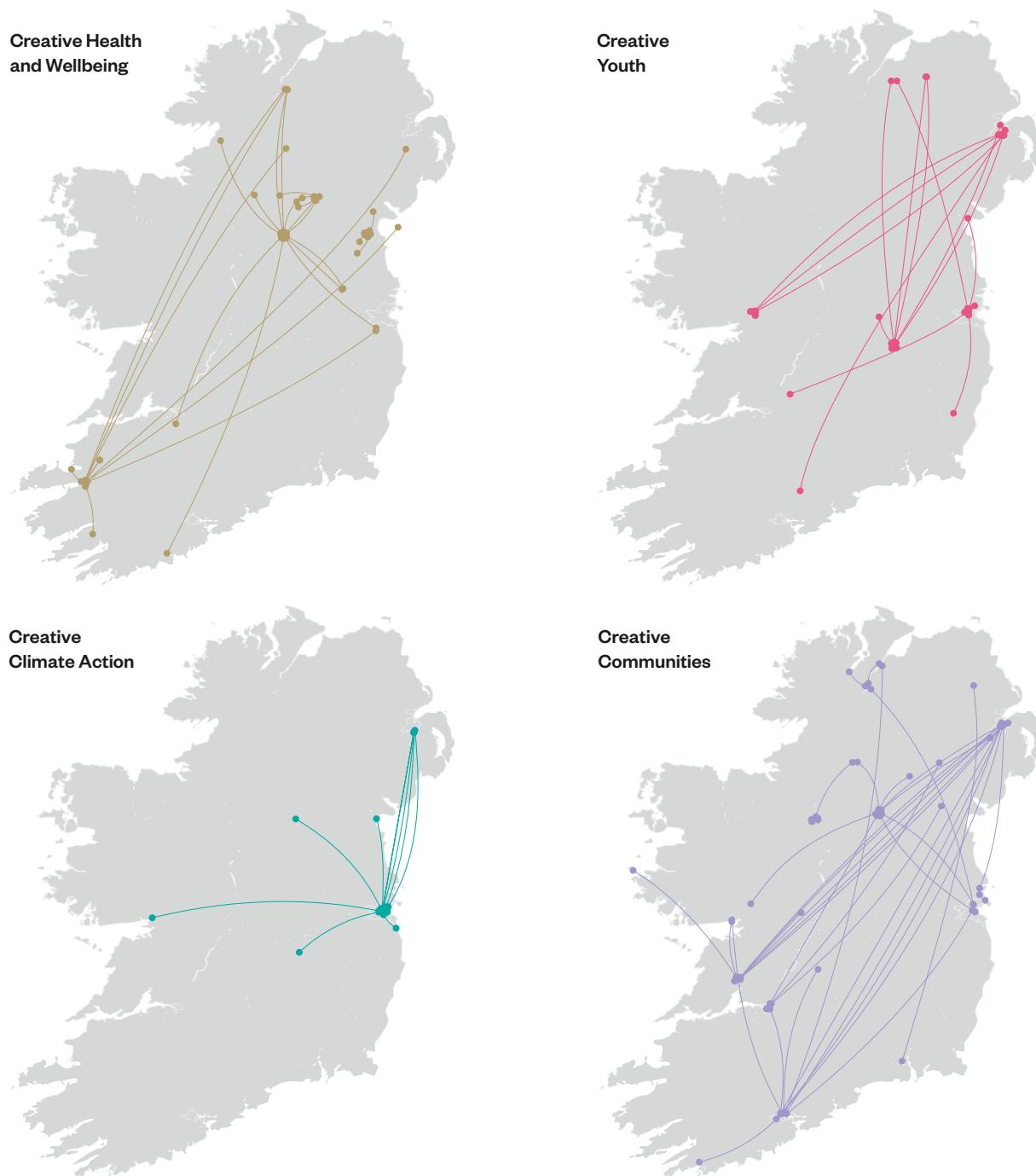


Figure 3: Partner Locations Grouped by Pillar



Spatial Profile of the Funded Projects

A spatial analysis was conducted in ArcGIS and KUMU to provide a detailed picture of how projects are distributed and interconnected across the island. By mapping the relationships between project leads and their partners, the analysis highlights the collaborative networks underpinning delivery, as well as the geographic reach of individual initiatives.

Hotspot mapping identifies clusters of project activity, revealing areas of strong engagement and concentration of resources, while the jurisdictional breakdown offers insight into the balance of activities between regions. Together, these spatial layers illustrate not only where projects are located, but also how they function as all-island systems of collaboration and impact.

3. Purpose, Scope and Progress of the Evaluation



Pic:

Pic: *The Ties That Bind*
(Creative Communities on a Shared Island)

Shared Purpose



3. Purpose, Scope and Progress of the Evaluation

The primary objectives of this evaluation were to assess the impact of the Creative Ireland Shared Island initiative by:

1. Examining how, through creative projects, it fostered cooperation, connection, and mutual understanding across the island of Ireland;
2. Examining how, through creative projects, it contributed to social cohesion, cultural exchange, and the development of social capital among participants;
3. Providing evidence-based recommendations to guide subsequent iterations of all-island creative funding schemes.

This evaluation employed a mixed-methods design to comprehensively assess the impacts of 22 creative all-island projects, focusing on Shared Island cross-community effects and programme-level impact, rather than solely process evaluation of individual projects.

The scope covered four key thematic pillars of Creative Communities, Creative Climate Action and Sustainability, Creative Youth, and Creative Health and Wellbeing, alongside Cruinniú na nÓg, integrating both qualitative and quantitative evidence to triangulate findings across these domains.

Evaluation Team

The evaluation was led by M-CO, who brought Quality Matters and EMcG Solutions onto their team. The evaluation team has extensive experience in all-island and cross regional programme development, policy evaluation, impact assessment, and performance measurement of economic and non-economic impacts.

M-CO is a strategic design and project management consultancy with over 25 years of experience designing, delivering and evaluating projects across the island of Ireland with government departments, local government, state agencies, creative industries, heritage organisations, higher education institutions, and experts in health and social care across the island of Ireland.

Quality Matters bring specialised expertise in evaluating the impact of social service provision within the not-for-profit and state agency sectors. Its core mission is to support the development of high-quality, evidence-based services, with a strong focus on measuring social impact and value.

EMcG Solutions, based in Northern Ireland and led by Dr. Eileen McGloin, brings significant experience in research, analysis, and evaluation within both the public and private sectors, with over 20 years specifically in European Funding, Feasibility Research and Analysis, Evaluation, and Strategy Development.

Data Collection Methods

Workshops and focus groups were conducted with project stakeholders (project leads, project managers, project evaluators and the Creative Ireland Pillar Leads), representing a cross-section of project participants from both jurisdictions.

22 individual interviews were undertaken with the project team to capture in-depth perspectives, motivations, project journeys, collaboration processes, and lived experiences.

Comprehensive desk-based research was used to evaluate programme documentation, individual project reports, and external data sources.

Supplementary data gathered through internal workshops, a Miro board for idea tracking, and a database that logs project contacts, interviews, and thematic insights.

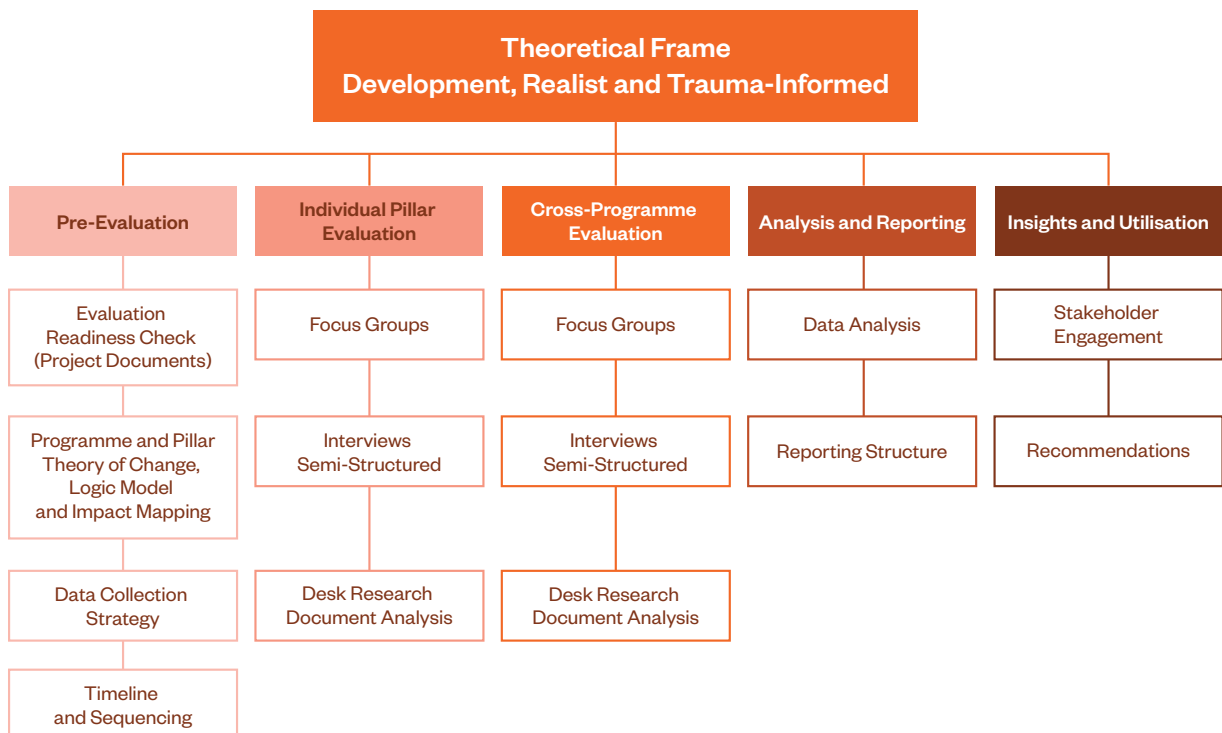
Analytical Framework

The overarching evaluation framework was informed by developmental and realist theoretical models, with trauma-informed principles integrated to recognise the specific context of all-island creative work.

The analysis links creative participation and project activities to measurable outcomes across each pillar, using a Theory of Change model (a description of how and why a change is expected to happen) and cross-programme comparative analysis.

Primary and pillar-specific research questions were developed to guide both interviews and focus groups. These address journey and motivation, all-island collaboration, engagement and impact, outcome measurement, and sustainability/legacy concerns.

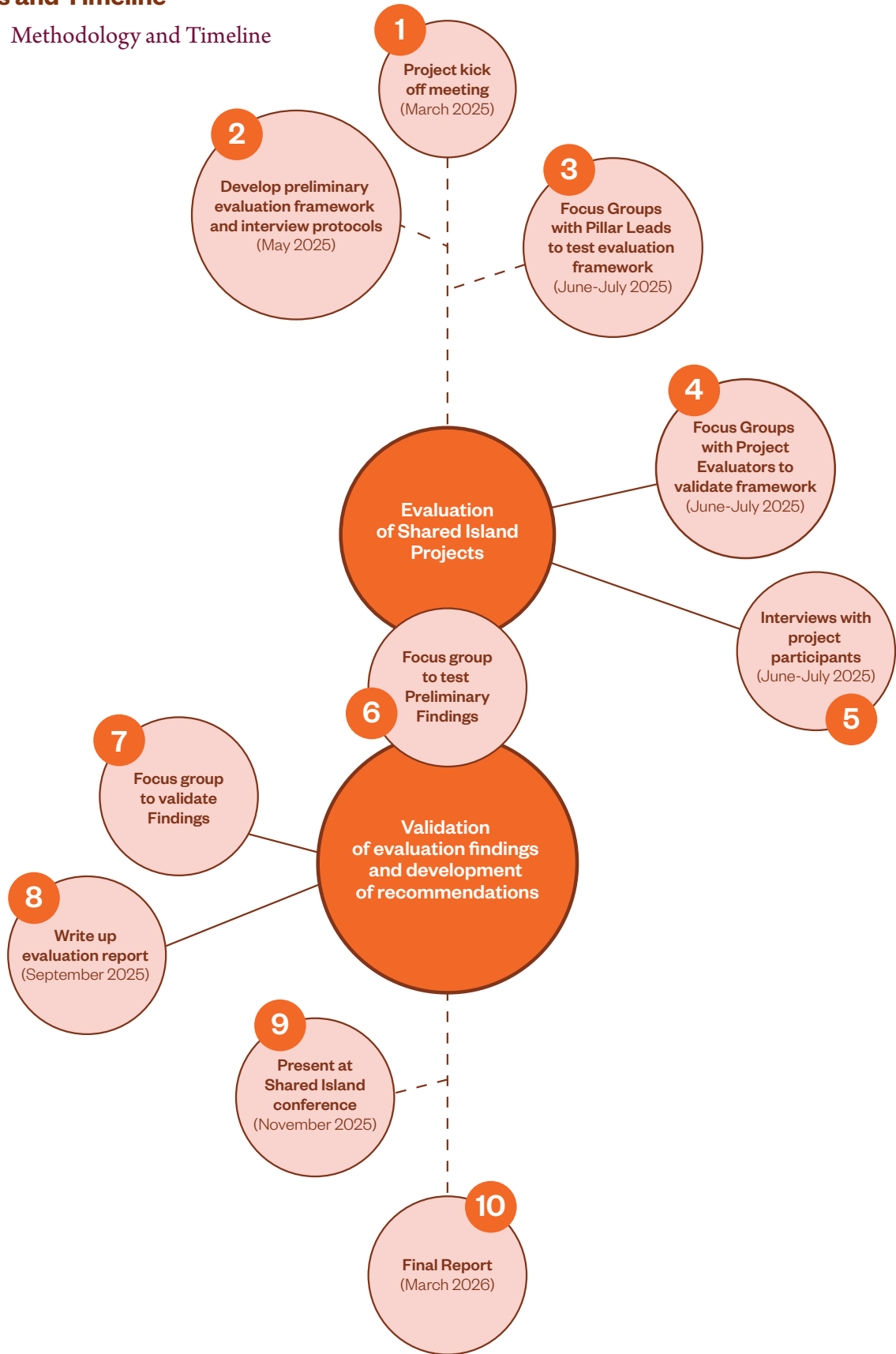
Figure 4: Evaluation Framework



Links arts participation to measurable development outcomes across multiple domains

Process and Timeline

Figure 5: Methodology and Timeline



Core Research Questions

1. What motivated organisational participation and how were Shared Island objectives interpreted?
2. How did all-island collaboration affect partnerships, administrative processes, and cultural understanding?
3. What evidence shows attitudinal change and effective/ineffective cross-community engagement?
4. What additional value stems from all-island elements versus single-jurisdiction activities?
5. What sustainability and legacy outcomes have emerged post-project?

Validation and Synthesis

Focus groups were used to validate insights gathered through interviews and desk research and support cross-pillar learning. Participants reflected on project outcomes, barriers faced, sustained partnerships, and future programming needs.

Data synthesis addressed evidence gaps and prioritised recommendations for future Shared Island initiatives.

Robustness and Feasibility

The methodology was designed to maximise inclusivity, address potential logistical, ethical, and timing constraints, and ensure data robustness through iterative refinement based on stakeholder feedback and evidence validation cycles.

Pic: *Shifting Tides and Sea Change: Creative Coastal Communities* (Creative Climate Action Fund II - Agents for Change)



4. Cross-Cutting Findings - The Shared Story of Collaboration



Pic: *Birds of a Feather* (Creative Communities on a Shared Island)



Shared Stories

4. Cross-Cutting Findings - The Shared Story of Collaboration

This section presents cross-cutting findings from interviews and focus groups with project participants and stakeholders. The cross-cutting findings reveal that while the Creative Ireland Shared Island initiative presents unique opportunities for fostering all-island collaboration and community-led initiatives, success requires careful planning, flexible approaches, and adequate resources to address inherent challenges and ensure long-term sustainability.

The diverse range of projects, with their unique processes, participants, and outcomes, demonstrates the initiative’s potential to foster positive change by using creativity as a unifying force, strengthening partnerships, ensuring inclusion across communities, and promoting innovative ways of working across the island of Ireland.

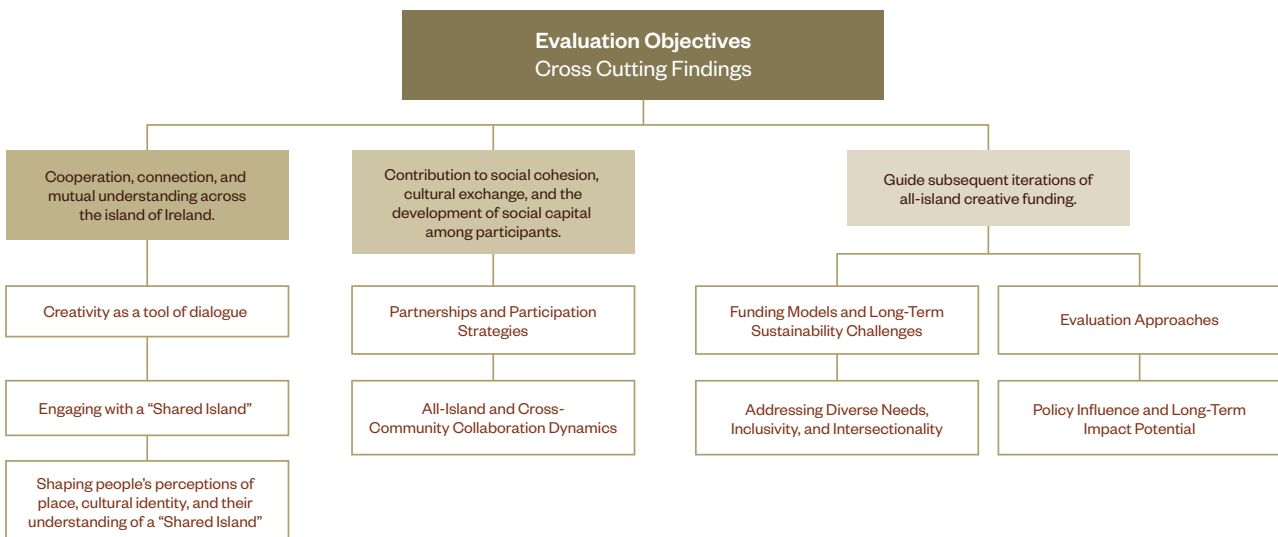
To maximise future impact and sustainability, systematic attention must be given to the challenges identified in this evaluation which include administrative complexity across jurisdictions, limited project management

resources, accessibility barriers for participants, and short project timelines.

Addressing these through enhanced project management, more flexible and longer-term funding, stronger all-island guidance, greater inclusion of diverse participant needs, and more structured knowledge-sharing will be essential for building on the success achieved to date.

To reflect the emerging cross cutting findings through the lens of the primary evaluation objectives, the insights and findings are grouped under the following headings.

Figure 6: Evaluation Objectives and Emerging Themes



Shared Island Theory of Change

Research into the ongoing social and cultural challenges in Ireland and Northern Ireland reveals that identity and social relationships remain deeply complex and contested, shaped by a prolonged history of sectarian conflict, socio-economic disparities, and evolving demographic changes.

Despite significant investments and initiatives, persistent segregation and contested public spaces underscore the ongoing challenges in achieving sustainable peace and integration (Harikrishnan, 2023, Holland, 2023).

These factors continue to present significant barriers to cross-community engagement, with entrenched narratives and collective memories reinforcing divisions. However, the research literature also emphasises the transformative potential of practical interventions, particularly those grounded in creative and cultural programmes, which create shared spaces for dialogue, empathy, and identity exploration.

Since the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, research has shifted from overt conflict to the complexities of peacebuilding and social cohesion, highlighting the role of cultural and educational interventions in fostering dialogue and reconciliation (O'Prey, 2022, Byrne et al., 2022).

Creative initiatives, including theatre, social circus, storytelling, and public festivals, effectively engage diverse participants at emotional and cognitive levels, facilitating perspective shifts and fostering social solidarity. These interventions often leverage performative and ritual dimensions to address cultural trauma, contributing to the reimagining of collective identities and public spaces.

Creative initiatives, such as social circus and theatre, effectively engage participants at emotional and cognitive levels in identity exploration and challenge sectarian assumptions, fostering empathy and new perspectives (Grant, 2024, Lybeck, 2023). All-island cultural cooperation is shown to create opportunities for dialogue and shared identity construction, contributing to peacebuilding efforts (Lagana and White, 2021, Lagana, 2021). The performative and ritual dimensions of arts events provide transformative social spaces that address cultural trauma, contributing to the reimagining of collective identities and public spaces. (Downey and Sherry, 2022, Downey and Sherry, 2023).

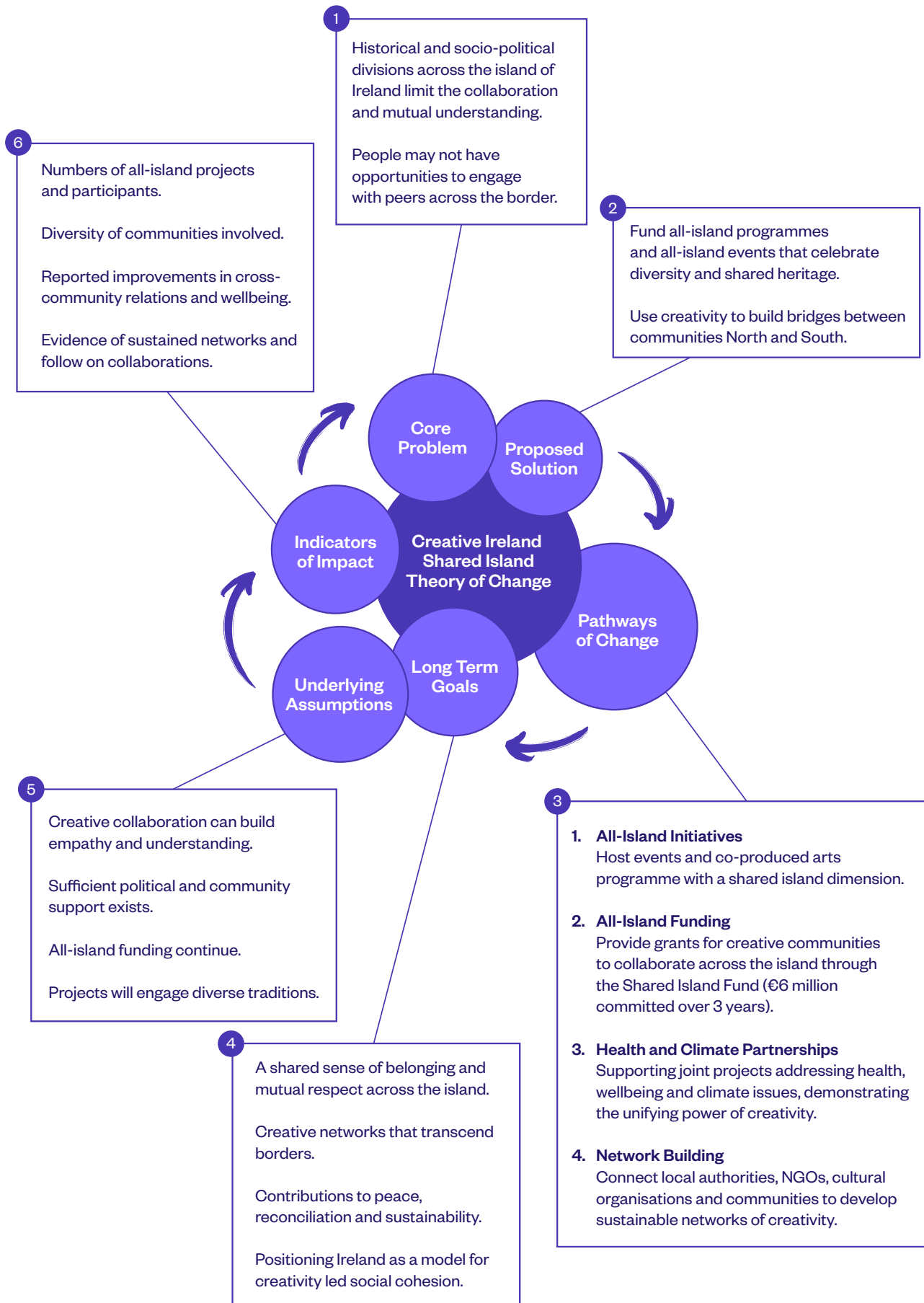
The impact of such initiatives is often difficult to quantify, with evaluations hampered by a tension between creative processes and outcome measurement (Grant, 2024). Some initiatives risk reinforcing existing divisions if not carefully managed, and inclusivity remains a challenge, particularly regarding migrant and minority ethnic groups (McIvor and Walsh, 2024, Alfaro-Hamayon, 2018).

While numerous initiatives exist, there is a notable gap in understanding how these programmes navigate complex identity politics, structural barriers, and varying community perceptions (Grant, 2024) (Hadley and Woodley, 2023, Koh, 2022.). The scalability and transferability of arts interventions are underexplored, limiting policy applicability (Rush, 2022).

Given this context, the evaluation team outlined a preliminary theory of change for the Creative Ireland Shared Island initiative to help inform evaluation.

"Creativity as a unifying force"

Figure 7: Creative Ireland Shared Island Theory of Change



In summary, this theory of change suggests that despite the ambitions of the Good Friday Agreement, many communities on the island of Ireland, whether all-island or cross-community, remain divided by history, culture, geography, and unequal access to creative opportunities. This persistent fragmentation affects social cohesion, cultural participation, and the ability to build shared narratives for the future.

The initiative directly addresses historical and sociopolitical divisions through a multifaceted approach of mutual understanding between communities in Northern Ireland and Ireland.

Through all-island community initiatives, all-island funding, health and climate partnerships, and network building, the programme aims to create shared experiences and connections among people and diverse communities.

By supporting creative projects, events, and partnerships that celebrate shared heritage and diversity, the initiative seeks to cultivate a sense of belonging and respect across the island. This theory of change is underpinned by the belief that creative collaboration can build empathy and understanding, ultimately transcending historical divisions and fostering more unified society across the island of Ireland.

Evaluation Objective 1 - Cooperation, connection, and mutual understanding across the island of Ireland.

Creativity as a tool for dialogue

The evidence gathered to date highlights how creativity serves as a powerful and multifaceted tool for dialogue by creating safe, accessible, and non-confrontational spaces where diverse groups can connect, share experiences, and build mutual understanding.

Interviews suggest that creative projects effectively facilitate communication and understanding across cultural, socioeconomic and political divides. Although approaches were varied, each project sought to facilitate a sequence of carefully and thoughtfully designed experiences where participants were empowered to engage, learn, share, connect and evolve their shared and individual perspectives on what it means to live on a shared island.

While specific art forms vary widely across music, songwriting, visual arts, crafts, dance, youth circus, and creative writing, the underlying principle of using creativity as a vehicle for connection is a commonality across all projects, with evidence of its use in transcending barriers and creating common ground, facilitating personal expression and vulnerability, and building relationships and fostering empathy.

These themes are further outlined below.

Transcending Barriers and Creating Common Ground

Creative activities provide a universal language that allows participants to communicate and connect beyond spoken words, cultural divides, or political sensitivities.

Establishing a Neutral Space

The act of making music together in *A Shared Island Songwriting Project* provided “the common ground” for participants to build relationships. *The Art of Life* focused on the difficult topic of death and dying, framing the work as a creative project was “very levelling”, allowing participants to engage in an “open creative space” without the pressure of expertise or defensive posturing.

“[The creative framing of workshops] offered space to be able to share without having a [work] agenda to get through.” (Creative Climate and Sustainability Project Team)

Moving Beyond Divisive Topics

The *Isle of Song* project intentionally did not address the border directly, with the organiser noting the “picture is so much broader” than historical divisions like “Catholic and Protestant”. Creativity provides a “positive upbeat” setting that “transcends a lot of the difficulties and challenges and divisions”.

“[The project has] breathed a little bit of hope and positivity back in, without going down the traditional orange and green approach.” (Creative Health and Wellbeing Project Team)

Overcoming Language and Communication Differences

In the *Birds of a Feather* project, craft workshops enabled Syrian women and deaf community members to participate fully through visual and

tactile learning, fostering inclusion without a sole reliance on words. Similarly, the *Sharing Songs and Unforgettable Voices* project found that singing allows people to communicate joy and memories, even when speech is impaired by dementia.

“There is nothing bleak about the participants. They feel part of something.” (Creative Communities Project Team)

Building Relationships and Fostering Empathy

Collaborative creative practices require interdependence and shared goals, which naturally accelerate the process of building trust and understanding between people.

Accelerating Social Bonding

In the songwriting project, the “intense environment” of a residential workshop had a significant impact on creativity and helped participants “gel really well”. Similarly, the *Dear Future Me* project used a collaborative baking exercise where some participants were blindfolded or couldn’t use their hands, requiring them to “rely on each other” and build trust.

“Both the artistic practice and the practicalities of a residential really do work well together because people are forced to be together, you’re forced to eat, you’re forced to have that conversation. Everything kind of is accelerated.” (Creative Youth Project Team)

Revealing Commonalities

Multiple projects reported that creativity was the medium through which participants discovered they were not so different. Young people in the *Dear Future Me* project initially saw differences between the groups but realised through creative activities they identified similarities despite different

backgrounds and realised that “they weren’t so different”. The *Living Legends* project is built on the principle of using stories to help people “see similarities more so than differences”.

“They’re all young people and they’re sharing the same backgrounds, traditions and challenges, and often that’s the best starting point to just say, look, we’re all in this together. We’re all dealing with some of the same issues in terms of accessing services or issues to do with antisocial behaviour.”
(Creative Youth Project Team)

Creating Shared Ownership

The collaborative design of murals in the *Building Shared Creative Communities* project reflected joint community stories and promoted

a sense of collective ownership. In the *Birds of a Feather* project, creating a final collaborative mosaic allowed different groups to contribute their unique identities to a single piece of artwork representing unity and diversity.

“Now they are coming into the centre and saying, Well, that’s my mural. And I did that.”
(Creative Health and Wellbeing Project Team)

Facilitating Personal Expression and Vulnerability

Creative processes offered a safe and structured way for individuals to explore and share personal stories, complex emotions, and sensitive histories.

Pic: *Farm Walks* (Creative Communities on a Shared Island)



Table 6: Case Study 1 – The Ties That Bind, Creative Communities - Building Relationships and Fostering Empathy

Project, Pillar	The Ties That Bind, Creative Communities
<p>Project's Aim</p>	<p><i>The Ties That Bind</i> is a collaboration between two community-rooted arts organisations: Levis' Corner House in Ballydehob, West Cork, and The Duncairn in North Belfast, with support from Cork County Council's Arts Office as lead partner.</p> <p>This project is designed to build artistic and community connections across regional and political divides through creative exchanges, collaborative residencies, mentoring, and hosting two weekend-long festivals and events annually.</p> <p>The project aims to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage mutual learning between communities through creative collaboration. • Support inclusion, understanding, and wellbeing. • Use art as a conversation tool and strengthen partnerships between community organisations, artists, and local authorities.
<p>Significant Challenge</p>	<p>Overcoming the geographic distance between rural Ballydehob and urban North Belfast was a logistical challenge in terms of travel, accommodation and scheduling, but also presented a challenge in terms of adjusting perceptions of the partner locations and overcoming the metaphorical barriers associated with the unknown.</p>
<p>Key Success</p>	<p>Travelling to a new place and having a positive shared creative experience adjusted people's perspectives and set the scene for new connection and relationship building as individuals and as communities.</p> <p>"Once people do make the journey, it's transformative. You can see the shift in people arriving in a place they've never been, getting a warm welcome, discovering how much they have in common with people they might never have met otherwise... That is the power of the project and why overcoming that perceived distance is a big part of the story."</p>
<p>E.g. of Unexpected Outcome</p>	<p>Informal collaborations have taken place, and continue, between artists who met through the project.</p>

Unlocking Difficult Conversations

The Art of Life, which deals with end-of-life planning, found that creative approaches helped participants “focus and get things clear in their heads” and even start conversations with family members. One woman reported she was able to talk to her 18-year-old about the topic for the first time by “using the creative aspects” of the project.

“Nobody had suspicions about the artist’s intentions, just curiosity.”
(Creative Climate and Sustainability Project Team)

Building Confidence and Voice

In the *Creative Connections - Shared Writing Across the Island* project, facilitators observed that creative writing helps young people who are initially “shy, reticent, nervous, withdrawn” to become “more vocal, more engaged, more positive, more open”. This growth in confidence enables them to proudly share their work and express themselves. *To The Power of Three* also noted that creativity gives young people the tools to channel their voices and express their opinions.

“Sometimes you get some really strong responses from parents who are witnessing a change in their young person and they’re obviously feeling that deeply. And maybe the child isn’t seeing it themselves, but the parents can see it.” (Creative Communities Project Team)

Exploring Identity and Heritage

In the *Shared Histories: Diverse Views* project, photography was an accessible medium for participants to share personal stories about identity and memory, creating a starting point for dialogue rooted in lived experience rather than abstract politics. The *Living Legends* project used a “story exchange” method where retelling

each other’s personal stories was a powerful way to break down barriers and stereotypes.

“The idea behind [story exchange] is to really break down barriers between people, address the stereotypes that we might have ... and get to know each other through personal stories. And the stories are always personal, real life stories from our lives.” (Creative Youth Project Team)

Navigating Trauma

The treatment of trauma and trauma-informed practices across the projects reveals a spectrum from no mention to direct engagement and calls for specific training.

The impact of historical trauma and cross-community sensitivities was a recurring theme. *To The Power of Three* illustrated this by detailing the need to build trust with participants from Derry, who live with a level of cautiousness, and the project’s adjustments, including providing mental health support, to address underlying anxieties.

Shared Histories: Diverse Views stands out as the most explicit in its recommendation for “trauma-informed facilitation training for project teams.” The project organisers detailed participants sharing family stories of trauma and needing emotional support, underscoring the necessity for professional training to handle such sensitive situations and build trust effectively.

The *Weaving Worlds Together* project outlined the broader goal of equipping facilitators to work with a diverse range of vulnerable groups, including those referred through social prescribing pathways, people with dementia, and the Traveller community.

The *Farm Walks* project demonstrated an unexpected but critical role in supporting mental health and reducing isolation for participants, leading to access to appropriate support in alignment with trauma recovery principles.

The Creative Cafés project highlighted challenges with inconsistent attendance among Direct Provision residents, speculating it could be linked to fear from anti-immigration protests, indicating an awareness of external factors impacting participant wellbeing.

Some projects, such as *Divergently Together*, directly addressed trauma as a significant factor in their work. They highlight the challenge of discussing climate change and disability, as it can bring up trauma for already disadvantaged communities.

Some projects such as *Circus Explored*, even without using the term “trauma-informed practices,” implicitly recognise the need for supportive and safe environments for participants with different backgrounds.

“There were family stories of the impact of parents dying young, stillborn children, all victims who shared their trauma through the photographs they held close to their hearts.” (Creative Communities Project Team)

Engaging with a Shared Island

Several projects directly incorporated the Shared Island theme into their creative activities, prompting participants to reflect on what it means to them. For example, Creative Youth projects explicitly used Shared Island as a central theme. In one project, facilitators posed the question of what sharing an island means, which elicited thoughtful provocations from young participants, such as, “Who are we sharing the island with?” and “Why is it us answering this?”. This demonstrated a critical engagement with the concept beyond simple geography.

A climate action project framed its work with the understanding that climate change is a global issue that transcends political borders, making a Shared Island approach essential. The project leader noted, “we all live on an island”, so environmental issues must be addressed jointly

by communities in both Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Some projects rooted all or parts of their work in shared physical spaces, for example *Shifting Tides* (Carlingford Lough), *Dance Connects* (Marble Arch Caves) and *Divergently Together* (Cuilcagh Geopark), each bringing people together in a shared geography.

In this context, the creative project provided implicit and organic experiences of a Shared Island among participants as well as organisers. These themes are further outlined below.

Implicit and Organic Experiences of Shared Island among Participants

For many participants, the experience of a Shared Island was less about a political or conceptual definition and more about the practical and emotional realities of all-island interaction and discovering shared humanity.

Discovering Common Ground through Creativity

Across multiple projects, creative activities served as a powerful tool for dialogue, allowing people to find common ground beyond political or cultural divides. In a songwriting project, music was seen as the “common ground” that facilitated *In Farm Walks*, stories of land, family, memory and identity surfaced naturally, and creativity helped dissolve perceived distinctions to the point where it became difficult to distinguish between artist and farmer. In that shared environment, friendships formed that transcended geography and background.

“They’re just building relationships naturally, not from a political point of view, not from a religious point of view, not from a we’re going to change the world point of view. They’re just making friends. And that’s the best way to change the world.” (Creative Communities Project Team)

Practical Barriers and Realities

The Shared Island experience was also defined by practical and administrative barriers. Many projects noted that all-island collaboration felt like running “international projects” due to different currencies, legal frameworks, and administrative systems. For one group of young people in Direct Provision, the Shared Island was inaccessible, as they were unable to travel across the border. For young people in Northern Ireland, Brexit has limited their access to European exchange opportunities available to their southern counterparts.

“The organising of it and the managing it...it’s taken up a lot more time than I thought it was going to and it just seems to take forever to do the simplest of things.” (Creative Youth Project Team)

“Artists and facilitators are looking at their colleagues working just a few miles over the border and they see the incredible opportunities [they have].” (Creative Communities Project Team)

The Organisers’ Perspective on Shared Island

Project organisers experienced Shared Island through the lens of building partnerships, navigating logistical complexities, and observing the transformative power of all-island connections.

Relationship Building is Key

A common theme for organisers was the importance of investing time in building strong, trusting partnerships across jurisdictions. They found that getting the “right people at the table” was crucial for success. Relationship building is key because it enables trust, co-design, smoother delivery, resilience against challenges, and sustainability beyond the life of the project.

“Without it, this work risks becoming transactional, with it, the project becomes transformative”. (Creative Communities Project Team)

Partnership Imbalances and Support Needs

Organisers from Ireland often became aware of significant disparities in funding and support available to their Northern Irish partners. This led to a recognition of partnership imbalances, with one project lead noting the feeling that “they are holding an awful lot more than we are... they appear to have a tougher time”.

Consequently, projects often adapted to provide additional support to their Northern Irish partners to build trust and balance the dynamic. This could be addressed through equitable funding design, targeted capacity-building, co-design and shared leadership, practical all-island supports, and longer-term investment.

“When you’re looking at a budget and trying to build transparency around it, processes and procedures are very important. We’re looking at two different territories, jurisdictions... We have to be very clear about our rationale.” (Creative Health and Wellbeing Project Team)

A Concept Broader than Politics

Many organisers deliberately chose not to frame the Shared Island concept around divisive topics like religion or politics. One noted, “It’s not about Catholic and Protestant... the picture is so much broader than that”. Another project intentionally avoided asking participants about their political affiliations to prevent creating discomfort. Instead, the focus was on shared creative goals and human connection.

Shaping people’s perceptions of place, cultural identity, and their understanding of a Shared Island

Insights from the interviews suggest that

the direct experience of all-island travel and residential stays profoundly shapes young people's perceptions of place, cultural identity, and their understanding of a Shared Island by moving them from abstract or stereotypical ideas to tangible, lived experiences of connection, difference, and shared humanity.

Shifting Perceptions of Place and Home

Travel and residential stays were pivotal in challenging young people's preconceived notions of their own localities and those of others, often fostering a newfound sense of pride and connection.

“That wasn't the original goal, but it's emerging from the partnerships and participants. That kind of thinking is a great sign that the project is resonating beyond the events themselves.” (Creative Communities Project Team)

A significant and unexpected outcome was that hosting visitors gave young people a new appreciation for their own hometowns. Participants from Dublin expressed pride in their local infrastructure, like the Luas tram system, when they saw how impressed visiting groups were. Similarly, a young person admitted he thought his town was “a kip” until participants from other places praised its beauty and history, making him realise “maybe where I live is actually OK”. This external validation helped them see their own environment through fresh eyes.

Moving from Abstract to Real

For many young people, particularly those from Ireland, places across the border were alien and distant. The residential stays transformed these abstract locations into real places with familiar faces. In one project, the first residential in Dublin was conceptualised as a “first time experience for a lot of them,” with organisers noting that for the Northern Ireland group, “Dublin's a faraway place”. The physical act of travelling and staying in these locations was essential for grounding

their understanding. Some participants from the east coast had never even been to Dublin before, highlighting how significant this travel was.

The Power of Landscape and Heritage

The residential stays were often located in places of natural beauty and historical significance, which became a powerful tool for connection. The *Living Legends* project held residential in Doolin, the Antrim coast, and Carlingford, using the “landscape of Ireland to help them to connect”. A tour of Enniscorthy, focusing on its role in the 1798 Rebellion, had a profound impact, with the history of the place coming through in the young people's creative work.

“We landed and everyone's like ‘Oh my God, so green, lush. There's a big beautiful hill. It's just walks all over, hiking.’” (Creative Youth Project Team)

Confronting Stereotypes and Finding Common Ground

The immersive nature of residential stays brought cultural, social, and historical differences into sharp focus, forcing participants to navigate them directly rather than relying on stereotypes.

Initial interactions were sometimes marked by stereotypical “banter,” such as boys using phrases like “up the Ra” with an “ignorance to it” and girls using terms like “Taigs”. However, the residential experience, which forced them to be in mixed bands and spend all day together, meant that this language was “just left behind once they got to know the actual people”. They quickly realised their shared challenges related to accessing services or dealing with antisocial behaviour were more relevant than historical divides.

Revealing Divergent Lived Experiences

The residential exposed a deep cultural divide in how young people experience history and expression. A young person from Derry was shocked to hear a story of the 1798 Rebellion told

so “freely” in Ireland, as he was used to a culture where one has to “watch what they say, make sure what they say is neutral”. This highlighted the “blissful ignorance” of many Irish participants regarding The Troubles, with some associating the name “Derry” with “dairy milk”. For many from Ireland, a consciousness of the border simply “isn’t there”.

“I’d say that this project is more insightful in terms of the all-island stuff for people from Ireland than it is for people from [Northern Ireland] who know it, they live in it...it’s very, very clear to them what environment they’re living in and I think people that live [in Ireland] are just oblivious.” (Creative Youth Project Team)

Trust Building as a Core Process

Organisers observed that the dynamic of trust-building was fundamentally different. For the groups from Ireland, there was a sense that “the trust was there unless it was broken,” whereas “with [the Northern Ireland partner(s), the trust had to be built”. The residential setting was a powerful accelerator for this process; being in an “intense environment” where they lived, ate, and worked together helped the groups “gel” far more quickly than weekly workshops would allow. Unplanned shared experiences, such as a traumatic ferry trip to Inis Mór, also acted as a powerful, unintentional bonding exercise.

“Where I would see where you’d notice that trust is building is when they start eating together and not eating with their own groups.” (Creative Communities Project Team)

Forging a Shared Island Identity Through Connection

Ultimately, the travel and residential stays enabled a practical, human-centred

understanding of a “Shared Island,” defined by personal relationships rather than political concepts.

A Shared Island Built on Friendship

The most profound impact was the formation of genuine friendships that transcended geography and background. Participants who were initially wary of each other were observed “running up and hugging” at later events. The creation of shared WhatsApp groups and the tears shed at the end of the first residential demonstrated how “emotionally invested” they had become. This desire to continue the relationships was a key driver for legacy projects.

“The sense of connection, friendships, conversations is our biggest success.” “It has been a love in; all we are short of yet is a baby!” (Creative Communities Project Team)

The Concept Made Tangible

While project facilitators sometimes posed direct questions about what a Shared Island means, the concept was most powerfully understood through the act of sharing space. By mixing the groups for activities and social time, participants discovered commonalities in a natural way. The experience of travel was itself a barrier for some, with young people in Direct Provision unable to cross the border at all, making their exclusion from a Shared Island painfully literal. For those who could travel, the experience created a tangible sense of a shared space, rich with new friendships and a more nuanced understanding of their neighbours.

“The solidarity among the women has left a legacy of genuine cross-border and cross-community friendship and respect.” (Creative Communities Project Team)

Table 7: Case Study 2 – To The Power of Three, Creative Youth - Shaping people’s perceptions of place, cultural identity, and their understanding of a Shared Island

Project, Pillar	To The Power of Three, Creative Youth
Project’s Aim	Through a programme of monthly workshops and creative exchange across three locations, the project is designed to support participants (young people aged 16-24) in developing their artistic practice. Before culminating in a final performance, the three groups explore each other’s landscapes, community culture and broader artistic landscape, with the aim of supporting the development of the communities’ relationships.
Significant Challenge	With a project that uses ‘place’ as creative fodder, participants needed to have a level of freedom and mobility to explore each of the three locations. This meant that logistical challenges around differing child protection requirements across the two jurisdictions came to the fore. The project team worked collaboratively to understand, explore and address this, along with other logistical challenges that arose.
Key Success	<p>The intense nature of the multi-day residential provided opportunity for the participants to absorb the location, engage with others creatively and socially, and to create, reflect on, and refine their work. This time and space for iteration and connection is unique to the residential format, and participants were encouraged to then extend their creative mindset beyond the project, to be “artistically present in life”.</p> <p>The growth in confidence, trust and emotional investment was notable as the project progressed.</p>
E.g. of Unexpected Outcome	Using ‘place’ as material for collaboration led to participants absorbing “the fingerprints of each location” into their mindset, not just when visiting a partner location, but also when asked to reconsider their own ‘place’. As hosts, participants saw what was familiar to them through the eyes of others and developed an increased sense of pride.

Evaluation Objective 2 - Contribution to social cohesion, cultural exchange, and the development of social capital among participants.

Partnership and Participation Strategies

The projects used a diverse range of strategies and approaches to engage communities, adapting their methods to suit specific contexts, target groups, and geographical locations. The core of these approaches can be grouped into several key themes:

- leveraging strategic partnerships,
- using creativity as a primary engagement tool,
- implementing structured and gradual interaction, and
- being highly adaptive and responsive to participant needs.

Leveraging Strategic Partnerships and Existing Networks

Nearly every project highlighted the critical importance of partnering with established local organisations to reach and build trust with communities. Rather than starting from scratch, they tapped into existing networks.

Working with Trusted Intermediaries

Projects frequently collaborated with organisations that already had strong relationships within target communities. The *Dear Future Me* project worked with the HSE and migrant support centres to promote activities through their networks and with service users. The project also had an advisory committee including the council, the LMETB (Education Training Board), and the Children and Young People's Service Coordinator.

Similarly, *Creative Cafés* partnered with Social Prescribing Link Workers, local libraries, migrant support centres, and the HSE to reach marginalised groups. This was a very strategic approach to ensure the project was “accessible and inclusive of marginalized people”.

The Art of Life project on end-of-life conversations chose its partners “wisely,” working with Cavan Age Friendly, Southwest Age Partnership, and library services in both Cavan

and Northern Ireland, who were “very well placed to recruit and help you reach older people”. The *Living Legends* project recruited young people by engaging with youth organisations it had worked with previously, such as South Hill youth hub, and by using an interagency network in Limerick to make the reach as broad as possible.

Co-designing with Partners

Successful engagement was often built on a foundation of co-design, where delivery partners were involved from the application stage, ensuring shared ownership and vision. In *The Ties That Bind*, the delivery partners Levis' Corner House and The Duncairn

“planned everything together whether it's artist selection, event programming, or community engagement”.

The *Farm Walks* project was co-designed with farmers themselves, ensuring activities were grounded in their “interests, knowledge, and lived experiences”. The *Shared Histories: Diverse Views* photography project was conceived by a consortium of experienced organisations, including Photo Museum Ireland, the Regional Cultural Centre, the Nerve Centre, and the National Library of Ireland, all bringing complementary expertise.

“If you are parachuting into a community where you’re not known or trusted, build from your small connections.” (Creative Climate and Sustainability Project Team)

Table 8: Case Study 3 – Shifting Tides and Sea Change: Creative Coastal Communities

Project, Pillar	Shifting Tides, Creative Climate Action and Sustainability
Project’s Aim	The Shifting Tides Project is a two-year, all-island initiative that uses a two-phased approach to connect coastal communities and marine environments on both sides of Carlingford Lough. Situated between Northern Ireland and Ireland, the project blends creative arts and practical ecology to foster collaboration across borders, cultures, and disciplines.
Significant Challenge	The complexity of the project’s design presented its own unique challenges. As an all-island, multi-community, multi-artist, multi-scientist project with many collaborators, events and community stakeholders, there were logistical and operational demands that was possible due to the fact that the project was operating with the support of a large organisation with strong communications and finance teams.
Key Success	The project has facilitated the development of a series of relationships (including a local cross-community network known as the Lough-Keepers, and a business relationship between scientists and oyster farmers) which project leads have worked to ‘plug into’ the broader stakeholder ecosystem in order to help ensure these connections will continue beyond the project’s lifespan.
E.g. of Unexpected Outcome	The quality of the artistic outputs exceeded all expectations. One standout moment came when a composer from Cork, who records natural soundscapes and transforms them into music, reached out to the team. “We played her music, and it blew people’s minds that this is what the lough sounds like.” These sound-based experiences added emotional and sensory depth to the community’s understanding of their environment. Visual art also played a powerful role. The project displayed a photograph taken by one of the divers, revealing the vibrant underwater world of Carlingford Lough. The reaction was one of astonishment. These artistic revelations brought unseen ecosystems to light and reshaped how participants and visitors perceived the lough.

Using Creativity as an Accessible and Inclusive Tool

Creativity was the central mechanism for engagement across all projects, serving as a non-threatening and universal language to bridge divides and encourage participation. This included:

1. Hands-on, Non-Verbal Activities

Craft-based and practical workshops were highly effective at engaging diverse groups, including those with language barriers or different abilities. In *Birds of a Feather*, women from Ennis, Ballinasloe, Inishboffin and Belfast worked together on a shared craft piece. Creativity allowed women with different languages, abilities and backgrounds, including migrant women and members of the deaf community, to participate regardless of language or cultural barriers.

The *Dear Future Me* project used a collaborative baking exercise where participants were blindfolded or couldn't use their hands, forcing them to "rely on each other" and build trust through a shared, fun activity. The *Weaving Worlds Together* project focused on weaving, ceramics, and textiles because of their accessibility across different cultural backgrounds, creating space for informal dialogue.

"I never thought the arts were for me, but this project showed me they are, they're for all of us." (Creative Communities Project Team)

2. Storytelling and Shared Heritage

Many projects used personal stories, local history, and cultural heritage as powerful entry points for dialogue. *Living Legends* used a "story exchange" method where participants retell each other's personal stories in the first person, a technique designed to "break down barriers between people address the stereotypes".

The *Shared Histories: Diverse Views* project used participants' own family photographs as the starting point for conversations about identity, memory, and history, which felt more relevant and less intimidating than abstract politics. *Building Shared Creative Communities* explored the shared industrial heritage of linen and cotton industries in Waterford and Mid and East Antrim, connecting people's sense of place and pride.

"The idea behind [story exchange] is to really break down barriers between people, address the stereotypes that we might have ... and get to know each other through personal stories. And the stories are always personal, real-life stories from our lives." (Creative Youth Project Team)

3. Creating Neutral, Fun Environments

Projects were deliberately framed as positive and enjoyable, which helped to transcend difficult topics or historical divisions. This included, *The Creative Connections - Shared Writing Across the Island* project, which described its workshops as a "fun, enjoyable, positive, upbeat" setting that "transcends a lot of the difficulties and challenges and divisions".

The Ties That Bind project held a festival in Ballydehob on the 12th of July, using the date not as a point of division but as an "opportunity to host music and conversation exploring shared traditions and differences".

"[People] are able to go, 'Oh, I know nothing about art. I know nothing about creativity. Let's just go and do this workshop or do this thing.'" (Creative Climate and Sustainability Project Team)

Table 9: Case Study 4 – The Art of Life, Creative Health and Wellbeing - Using Creativity as an Accessible and Inclusive Tool

Project, Pillar	The Art of Life, Creative Health and Wellbeing
Project's Aim	<i>The Art of Life</i> is a Shared Island project that “aims to normalise conversations around death, dying, and end of life in order to encourage people to plan for end of life and communicate their plans and wishes with their family and loved ones.” Operating in Cavan and Fermanagh, it aims to influence policy and practice around advance care planning through demonstrating the effectiveness of creative interventions in addressing a traditionally difficult topic.
Significant Challenge	<p>The primary challenge involved engaging creatives and building their confidence and skills in addressing such a sensitive topic, as their concerns reflected broader cultural taboos.</p> <p>Engaging older people also proved difficult initially, because people sometimes had misconceptions about the project's purpose, thinking participants were potentially sick and concealing it, or were being morbid, or ‘bringing death to the door.’ This challenge was compounded by the unpredictable nature of people's responses to the topic.</p>
Key Success	The creative activities provide a non-threatening entry point into serious conversations. By engaging in poetry, visual arts, music, or other creative expressions, participants can explore difficult emotions and topics in ways that feel safer than direct discussion. The variety of creative approaches accommodates different comfort levels and preferences, ensuring that participants can find an entry point that works for them.
E.g. of Unexpected Outcome	The community-level networks show signs of sustainability, with participant groups continuing to meet independently and some individuals becoming repeat participants in community activities. This suggests the project has successfully connected people to broader community resources and social networks.

Implementing Structured, Phased, and Supported Engagement

Engagement was not a single event but a carefully managed process involving gradual introductions, structured activities, and significant logistical and emotional support.

Online to In-Person Progression

Several projects used online sessions as a preparatory step before face-to-face meetings, which was particularly helpful for anxious participants or those with additional needs.

This included:

The *Isle of Song* project held an initial online session to help young people understand the project and see familiar faces before meeting in person. A Youth Advisory Committee also met online to help plan the residential.

The *Divergently Together* project also used online intros before bringing participants together for an intense in-person gathering.

“We’ve had all the meetings online for participants. They are what they are, but they do help kind of lay a bit of groundwork and [get to know some] familiar faces.” (Creative Youth Project Team)

Residential Stays and Reciprocal Visits

Immersive, multi-day residential stays and visits to each other’s communities were universally cited as transformative for building deep connections and understanding. This included:

- In the *To The Power of Three* project, residential stays were where trust was accelerated, as participants were “forced to be together, you’re forced to eat, you’re forced to have that conversation”. By the second day of one residential, mixed North-South bands had “gelled quite well”,
- The *Living Legends* project held residential stays in beautiful locations like Doolin and the Antrim coast, using the “landscape of Ireland to help them to connect”, and
- *The Ties That Bind* project found the journey itself was transformative, with 150 people from a village of 350 travelling to the festival in Belfast, breaking down a “perceived psychological distance”.

This scale of participation created an extraordinarily special atmosphere and demonstrated the power of extended exchanges in forging deep all-island connections.

“Both the artistic practise and the practicalities of a residential really do work well together because people are forced to be together, you’re forced to eat, you’re forced to have that conversation. So everything kind of is accelerated.” (Creative Youth Project Team)

Targeted and Open Recruitment

Projects used a mix of targeted outreach and open calls to attract a diverse range of participants.

The *Dear Future Me* and *Creative Connections - Shared Writing Across the Island* projects specifically sought to engage young people who were “not connected into the mainstream activities” or were on the margins. The *Shared Histories: Diverse Views* and *Shifting Tides* projects used open calls, which successfully attracted a diverse mix of participants from different backgrounds, ages, and political identities.

“We deliberately did not ask people if they were nationalist or loyalist in the north. It’s very off-putting for people who are engaging.” (Creative Climate and Sustainability Project Team)

Being Adaptive, Inclusive, and Responsive

A key strategy was the ability to be flexible and adapt to the specific needs, capacities, and cultural contexts of the communities involved. Two primary approaches to this included the following:

Practical and Logistical Adaptations

Projects consistently adapted to meet diverse needs, which was crucial for ensuring genuine inclusion. The *Birds of a Feather* project made significant logistical adjustments for a Belfast group with mobility issues (accessible coaches, ground-floor rooms) and for Syrian participants with specific dietary requirements.

The *Divergently Together* project invested heavily in accessibility, providing sign language interpreters for both BSL and ISL, using plain English, and creating sensory-friendly spaces.

The *Sharing Songs and Unforgettable Voices* project has adapted to health needs, providing dementia-friendly settings so participants and carers can remain involved and engaged.

“[A project] can’t be judged on how other types of projects work. If you manage getting a wheelchair user, a deaf person, [and a] neurodivergent person into the into a room it takes 5 times the amount of work.” (Creative Climate and Sustainability Project Team)

Table 10: Case Study 5 – Birds of a Feather, Creative Communities - Being Adaptive, Inclusive, and Responsive

Project, Pillar	Birds of a Feather, Creative Communities
Project's Aim	The project brought together four women's groups from Belfast, Ballinasloe, Ennis, and Inishbofin to build relationships, share skills, and explore creative collaboration through crafts. Through open discussions, they built connections and friendships that fostered understanding, and respect.
Significant Challenge	Coordinating accessible travel, accommodation, and activities stretched staff capacity. Visits to Inishbofin were particularly challenging, with ferry schedules dictating arrival times and requiring additional overnight stays, making repeated trips impractical despite their strong impact on relationship building.
Key Success	<p>Using craft workshops as a universal, hands-on activity that transcends literacy, language, and cultural barriers, made it accessible to all, e.g. older women with limited mobility; migrant women, who could engage despite language differences; the deaf community members who fully participated through visual learning and practical demonstration.</p> <p>The visit to Inishbofin had a profound impact, with participants feeling they had travelled "off the island" in a metaphorical as well as geographic sense. The unique setting broke down perceived differences between people, creating a strong sense of unity that exceeded expectations.</p> <p>Practical adaptations, including accessible venues, transport, accommodation, dietary requirements, and interpreters, ensured that physical and communication barriers did not prevent involvement.</p>
E.g. of Unexpected Outcome	<p>Although the project aimed to build connections, an unexpected outcome was how deeply the women bonded across groups. Initially shy or hesitant, they developed strong friendships and supportive networks, with many maintaining contact outside of project activities.</p> <p>The age diversity (from 30s to 60+) created unplanned opportunities for intergenerational learning, with older participants sharing craft techniques and life experiences, while younger women introduced new cultural perspectives and digital skills.</p> <p>The participation of deaf community members in Ennis led to the unexpected inclusion of basic sign language workshops, enriching everyone's communication skills and promoting greater empathy and inclusion across the project.</p> <p>The involvement of Syrian women in Ballinasloe brought unplanned but valuable insights into Middle Eastern craft techniques, cultural traditions, and food practices, broadening understanding and appreciation among all participants.</p>

Responding to Group Dynamics and Capacity

Organisers had to be sensitive to the different starting points and comfort levels of their groups. The *Future Parade* project, working with a Belfast group with less performance experience, threw out its original plan for the first residential and instead focused on play, safety, and building trust, meeting the young people “where they were at”.

The *Dear Future Me* team learned that their most challenging group needed “a little more time to process being in the service before going into a bigger group,” demonstrating the need for patience and a graduated approach.

“What we’re going to do is we’re just going to slow everything right down and we’re going to work with these young people where they’re at. And then we’re just going to take it step by step and see.” (Creative Youth Project Team)

Pic: *Divergently Together*
(Creative Climate Action
Fund II - Agents for Change)



Table 11: Case Study 6 – Future Parade, Creative Youth - Responding to Group Dynamics and Capacity

Project, Pillar	Future Parade, Creative Youth
Project's Aim	Future Parade aims to help young participants develop a deeper understanding of the importance of consensus-building and collaboration in shaping their shared future, through creative activities and discussions which generate common themes of significance. Participating in meaningful creative exchange provides participants with new, transferable skills and the associated confidence building that develops from active participation with others.
Significant Challenge	Recruiting participants in Northern Ireland proved difficult for the project team, with many in the relevant cohort already subscribed to other activities when recruitment began. The project kicked off with a smaller number of participants in Northern Ireland and later, more participants joined. This required a move to a new venue, which had implications on logistics and travel time.
Key Success	In bringing together three groups of young people with differing levels of experience with performance, theatre and storytelling, and who hadn't worked together before, the project team adapted workshop plans and were guided by participants' interests. Hosting writing workshops which explore the concept of 'place' (a key component of Parade) and allowing time for informal connection and social moments help build up trust across groups. Despite any initial hesitancy around participating, young people produced "insightful, really deep pieces of work" which helped communicate different historical lived experiences and different lived environments across groups.
E.g. of Unexpected Outcome	The project was cross-community as well as all-island, and young people were generally willing to raise difficult topics and happy to engage in facilitated discussion about conflict and difference. Establishing trust was a vital component of the project and the willingness of young people to "break barriers and be open" contributed to discussions that perhaps would be avoided by older people, or those with more direct lived experience of conflict.

Co-design with Participants

Many projects, particularly those for young people, empowered participants to shape the activities, which fostered a strong sense of ownership and engagement. The *Dear Future Me* project operated a co-design model where participants chose from a "whole big menu" of activities, which improved their "sense of agency and also their confidence".

The *Living Legends* project took feedback from young people after each residential to decide on the artists and workshops for the next one, making it a "youth led project".

"With each residential we take feedback from the young people, build on it, and then in the next residential kind of decide what they do in terms of their artist engagement and workshops." (Creative Youth Project Team)

All-island and Cross-Community Collaboration Dynamics

All-island collaboration on creative projects presents **significant administrative hurdles** including differing regulations, all-island travel arrangements, currency exchange, cultural differences, and Brexit/Covid-19 impacts. Resource disparities between Northern Ireland and Ireland create additional barriers, while personnel changes within partner organisations add complexity.

Partnership dynamics and collaboration reveal wide-ranging experiences. While some projects benefit from strong, pre-existing relationships, others face significant challenges in building and maintaining effective collaborations. Early partner engagement and careful consideration of partner capacity and resources are highlighted as important.

Strategies for successful collaboration emphasise strong partnerships, pre-existing relationships, trust building, and relationship-building investment. Many projects avoid directly addressing political or cultural divides, focusing instead on shared interests or activities. Adapting to participant needs and employing inclusive approaches prove crucial, with Memoranda of Understanding formalising arrangements and supporting accountability.

Projects resulted in **unexpected positive outcomes** including new networks, collaborations, and initiatives extending beyond initial scope. Interviewees emphasise needs for more flexible funding structures, longer project timelines, thorough planning, enhanced project management support, and deeper understanding of historical context and political sensitivities in Northern Ireland.

Fostering friendships and relationships emerged as a central, often unexpected outcome across projects. Building trust and rapport serves as foundation for successful all-island collaboration, with methods varying significantly depending on project aims and participant characteristics.

Diverse relationship-building strategies include pre-project engagement through online and in-person meetings, shared creative activities transcending language barriers, residential stays providing intensive bonding opportunities, and social events fostering community sense. The importance of leveraging existing networks and partnerships is consistently highlighted.

Challenges in relationship building include overcoming initial apprehension between different participant groups, navigating cultural differences and potential partnership imbalances, addressing logistical obstacles, and allocating sufficient time for meaningful relationship development. However, **unexpected positive outcomes** including lasting friendships, new collaborations, and community-led initiatives which demonstrate the power of relationship building to foster collective action and sustained engagement.

“One of the major things with this kind of work where it’s about slow building relationships, social transformation, building connections is to be able to commit longer than one year.” (Creative Communities Project Team)

Figure 8: Impacted groups, to illustrate relationship building at different levels



Evaluation Objective 3 - Guide to subsequent iterations of all-island funding schemes.

Concerns around achieving long-term impact (at participant, community and policy-level) within programme timescales combined with the logistical challenges associated with all-island working suggest that future programmes may benefit from longer funding cycles.

Whilst there is an appetite to share learnings and approaches across projects, the complexity of creative, all-island work means that the emphasis on adaptability is a key characteristic of the programme as it allows projects to respond to emerging and changing needs of participants.

Funding Models and Long-Term Sustainability Challenges

Recurring concerns were raised about short timeframe funding (typically one or two years) hampering long-term sustainability. This timeframe is frequently cited by project teams as a barrier to meaningful relationship building, ambitious project delivery, and lasting impact achievement.

Administrative burden challenges beyond duration include all-island transaction complexities, unexpected bank charges, differing procurement policies, and rigorous funding drawdown verification requirements. The levels of project management support required also contributed to administrative strain in several projects.

Cross-community collaboration complexities underscore needs for careful consideration of existing social and political barriers. Creating networks that continue beyond the life of the project, ensures that the connections made are not temporary but become embedded in community and cultural life of those involved. Several projects reported outcomes that extended well past their initial goals. These included informal artistic collaborations sparked by *The Ties That Bind* with “new songs being written, and shows being planned,” and the “lasting involvement of carers and family members in *Sharing Songs and Unforgettable Voices*,” even after their loved ones had passed away.

Trust and relationships forged during the projects developed into sustained partnerships and social capital, giving communities the confidence and capacity to continue working together. The projects are allowing for ongoing collaboration, demonstrating that the most meaningful impact lies in building networks with the potential to grow and evolve long after funding has ended.

Strategies for long-term impact include lasting network creation, tangible legacy development through continued collaborations and new projects, follow-on funding securing, toolkit and model development for future projects, and successful model replication exploration.

Recommendations for improvement include longer funding cycles, more flexible structures, dedicated project management support, and improved all-island administrative processes.

Addressing Diverse Needs, Inclusivity, and Intersectionality

Projects demonstrate **strong emphasis on inclusivity** and diverse needs addressing, though approaches and detail levels vary significantly. Many projects actively implement strategies ensuring equitable participation, while others focus on broad accessibility and cross-community engagement without explicitly detailing specific marginalised group accommodations.

All-island collaboration challenges include differing funding models and resource disparities, administrative barriers, cultural and religious differences, and Northern Ireland political sensitivities impacting implementation and recruitment. Accessing and engaging loyalist communities in Belfast highlights community defensiveness and resource competition.

Adapting to diverse needs involves addressing accessibility for participants with disabilities, cultural and religious sensitivities, and varying experience levels. Projects tailor activities, provide support services, and employ flexible approaches accommodating individual needs.

Creative activities as unifying factors serve as common ground transcending language and cultural barriers, with activity choices carefully considered for accessibility.

Table 12: Case Study 7 – Divergently Together, Creative Climate Action and Sustainability - Addressing Diverse Needs, Inclusivity, and Intersectionality

Project, Pillar	Divergently Together, Creative Climate Action and Sustainability
Project's Aim	Divergently Together is a climate action project empowering disabled and neurodivergent communities across Ireland to engage in climate action by platforming their voices and exploring ways in which climate policy can be more inclusive. The project focuses on “learning how climate change affects disability communities and how disability communities can support climate action.” The initiative brings together a community of neurodivergent individuals from across the border region in Cavan and Fermanagh and Omagh district councils to explore how neurodivergent people can connect more meaningfully with the planet and environment.
Significant Challenge	Perhaps most fundamentally, the team faces the challenge of “designing an inclusive project in a non-inclusive space.” One of the primary challenges is that creating an inclusive project “can’t be judged on how other types of projects work.” For example, creating a space that is as accessible as possible for a diverse group of people (sign language speakers, neurodivergent people, wheelchair users, someone with low immune system, for example) unfortunately isn’t standard practice right now, so event and project preparation needs to be highly considered through research and consultation with communities, venues, speakers and production teams. As these considerations are often new or unknown this means event realisation and prep takes longer than other projects. This isn’t always understood or accounted for in project timelines and expectations.
Key Success	The most successful approaches centered on creating genuinely inclusive spaces and processes. This required significant upfront investment in accessibility, including "slowing down, using plain English," investing in sign language interpreters and audio description, providing easy reads and "know before you go" supports, and ensuring physical accessibility with equipment like ramps and sensory stimming tools. A particularly powerful indicator of impact came from participant feedback at their first in-person gathering: "I'd never been in a space like this before." This response highlighted how the project's approach to creating inclusive, supportive environments was genuinely novel for many participants. The project's framing and holding of different spaces - including sensory areas, permission to move in and out of sessions, and individualised check-ins - gave participants "an understanding of what they can advocate for themselves in other spaces."
E.g. of Unexpected Outcome	The creative framing allowed the team to show “humanity and empathy and get people excited about the process” rather than approaching accessibility as merely a compliance issue driven by EU directives. This shifted the conversation from obligation to opportunity, making stakeholders more engaged and enthusiastic about inclusive practices.

Evaluation and Impact Measurement Approaches

Funded projects used diverse yet interconnected evaluation strategies with prevalent use of mixed-methods approaches combining quantitative data (attendance records, survey results) with qualitative data (observations, interviews, focus groups, participant feedback). This reflects commitment to capturing both breadth and depth of project impact.

Qualitative data captures nuanced changes in participants' wellbeing, confidence, and cross-community understanding, though challenges in data collection include survey completion difficulties, adapting methods for participants with specific needs, and limitations of traditional methods for certain populations. Flexible and adaptable approaches are consistently emphasised.

External evaluation and multi-level approaches suggest recognition of independent assessment value. Some projects employ multi-level evaluation incorporating workshop-level feedback, program-level evaluations, and internal impact assessments for comprehensive effectiveness pictures.

The individual cross-community creative projects are measured and documented using a multi-layered approach that combines formal evaluation structures with more adaptive, qualitative, and creative methods. This is particularly important when working with participants for whom traditional evaluation methods like lengthy surveys are inappropriate or inaccessible, such as those living with dementia, individuals with low literacy or intellectual impairments, or young people who may be shy or withdrawn.

Formal and Structured Evaluation

Many projects have formal evaluation frameworks in place, often involving external or academic partners to ensure rigour.

External and Academic Evaluators

Several projects contracted independent, external evaluators from the outset. This is seen as a way to document outputs, outcomes, and impacts robustly. *The Art of Life* project partnered with the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland to conduct a "social return on investment type evaluation," lending academic credibility to their findings. *The Living Legends* project's evaluator was noted as being crucial for capturing insights during residentials that the youth workers, who are in the midst of delivery, might miss.

Pre- and Post-Surveys

Traditional surveys are used to establish a baseline and measure changes in attitudes and understanding over time. The *Creative Boardroom: Collaborate4Climate* project used a pre/post-test approach with surveys to assess participants' understanding of climate change at the beginning and end of the workshops. Similarly, the *Creative Cafés* and *Shared Histories: Diverse Views* projects used baseline and end-of-project surveys to track shifts in attitudes.

Logic Models and Frameworks

Some projects developed structured frameworks to guide their data collection. The *Divergently Together* team created a logic model identifying "what we want to happen, what would tell us that it is happening and how we get that information". *The Ties That Bind* project also established an independent evaluation framework combining quantitative and qualitative methods.

Adaptive and Qualitative Methods

Recognising the limitations of formal methods, especially with vulnerable or diverse groups, projects employ a range of more human-centred and creative approaches.

Observational and Anecdotal Evidence

For participants with dementia or intellectual impairments, observation is a key tool. The *Sharing Songs and Unforgettable Voices* choir project relies on observing mood, facial expressions, and body language, as well as gathering feedback directly from carers, to understand the project's impact. In the *Creative Cafés* project, feedback from occupational therapists, who reported that patients called the sessions "the highlight of their week," served as a powerful indicator of wellbeing. The *Dear Future Me* team saw the impact when they observed participants who were previously "civil" running up and hugging each other at a public event.

Creative and Reflective Tools

Projects use creative outputs themselves as a form of documentation and evaluation.

- The *Living Legends* project compiled an **anthology** of the creative writing, improv, and stories created by the young people,
- The *Dear Future Me* project used a "**letter to future self**" method, where participants write a letter that is posted back to them after 100 days, allowing for personal reflection on their journey,
- The *Farm Walks* project used creative evaluation tools like **visual mapping, drawing, and group storytelling** to enable participants to express insights beyond "words and numbers", and
- The *Isle of Song* project provides participants with **customised notebooks** for their lyrics, which serve as a memento and a tangible record of their creative work.

Focus Groups and Facilitated Discussions

Group discussions are widely used to gather qualitative feedback. The *Laces of Ireland* project used focus groups to explore changes in perception, confidence, and social connections. In the *Divergently Together* project, reflective sessions at the end of each engagement were vital for organically gathering participants' thoughts.

Video and Multimedia Documentation

Several projects use video to capture the process and impact. *The Art of Life* project is collating videos of people speaking on camera about the project's impact. Similarly, the *Sharing Songs and Unforgettable Voices* choir has a videographer capturing rehearsals, interviews, and performances to document moments of creativity and connection.

Internal and Team-Based Reflection

Impact measurement is also an internal process, used by the project teams themselves for continuous learning and adaptation. Examples of how this was implemented in some projects include:

- **Internal Evaluation and Communities of Practice** e.g. The *Creative Connections - Shared Writing Across the Island* project has a three-tiered evaluation system that includes immediate workshop wrap-ups with facilitators, formal programme evaluations, and a quarterly "community of practice" among staff for in-depth reflection and impact assessment, and
- **Reflective Sessions with Partners** e.g. Many projects hold regular meetings with delivery partners where progress is monitored and feedback is shared, allowing for real-time adjustments. In the *Farm Walks* project, reflection pieces were reviewed after each walk to ensure flexibility and responsiveness.

The evaluation and impact measurement strategies used across the Shared Island projects demonstrate that there is no single template that can capture the complexity of creative, cross-community work. The diversity of approaches, from structured surveys and external academic evaluations to creative tools such as storytelling, songbooks, and reflective letters, reflects the wide range of participants, contexts, and outcomes involved.

There is a need for flexibility of approach, projects must be able to adapt their evaluation methods to suit the people they are working with, whether that means observing the mood of a person living with dementia, inviting young people to reflect through art rather than forms, or recording shifts in confidence and trust that only become visible over time. This emphasis on adaptability ensures that the richness of human connection, dialogue, and change can be documented in ways that go far beyond numbers, while also building an evidence base that will inform future policy and funding decisions over time.

Policy Influence and Long-Term Impact Potential

Diverse approaches to all-island collaboration demonstrate effective use of creative methodologies for community engagement and relationship building. However, challenges and complexities involve navigating differing regulations, administrative procedures, procurement processes, and currency conversions, with flexible funding structure needs repeatedly emphasised.

It was not an expectation that projects would individually directly influence policy but the potential for policy influence was probed throughout the evaluation. Some projects directly aimed to influence national policy by providing robust data and recommendations to government departments, while others focussed on building community capacity and creating replicable models with the direct policy influence yet to be fully realised.

While some projects deliberately sought to inform government policy, others felt it was too early to measure, and several said they were unsure how policy impact could or should be achieved in the context of an individual project.

To build on this in future, projects could benefit from a discussion or guidance on what policy influence means in practice and how is creative work translated into evidence and recommendations that policymakers can use.

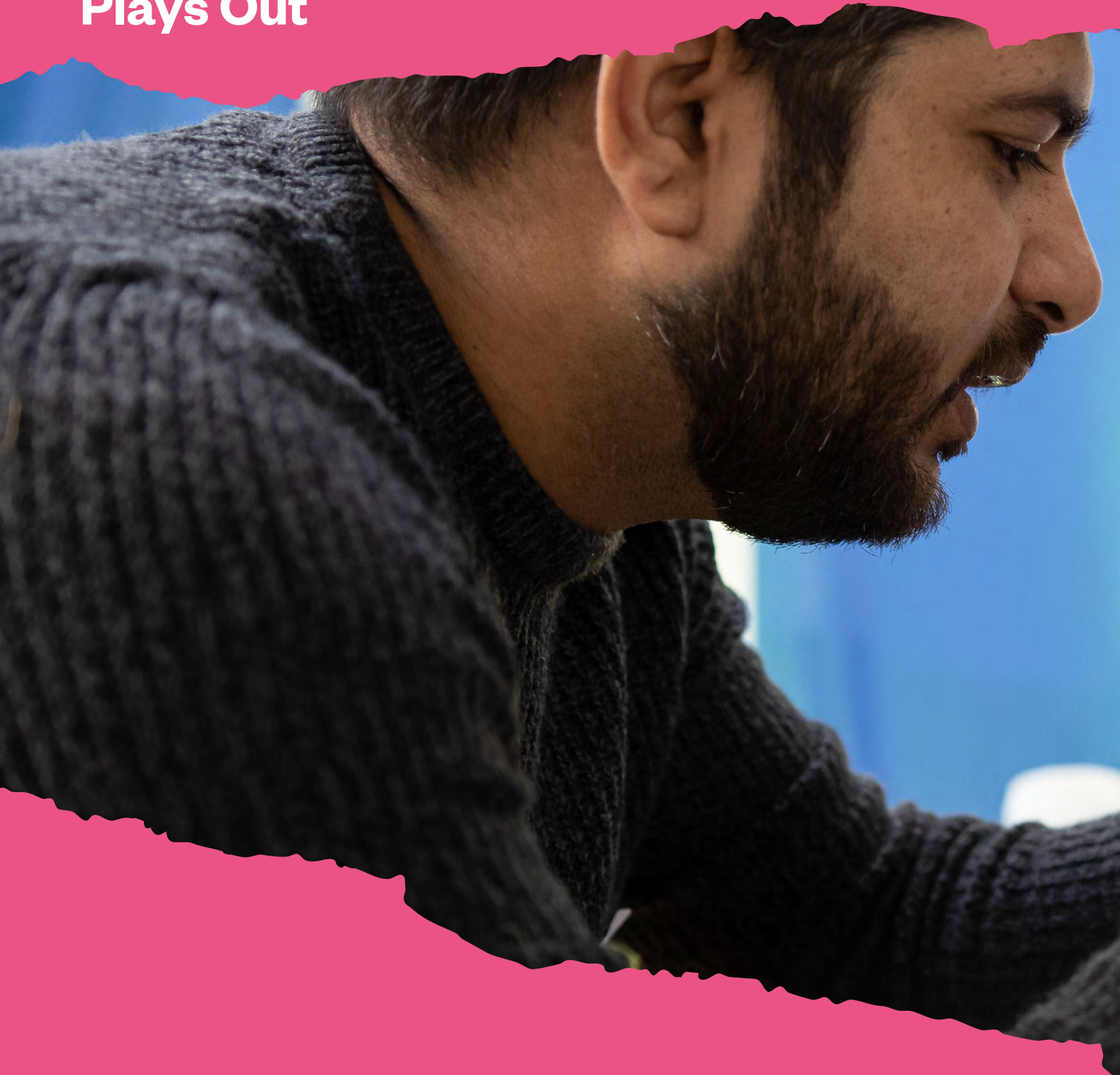
A focus on policy influence can help ensure the legacy of Shared Island projects extend beyond immediate community outcomes to shaping longer-term strategies for cultural cooperation across the island.

"..adaptability ensures [sic] the richness of human connection"

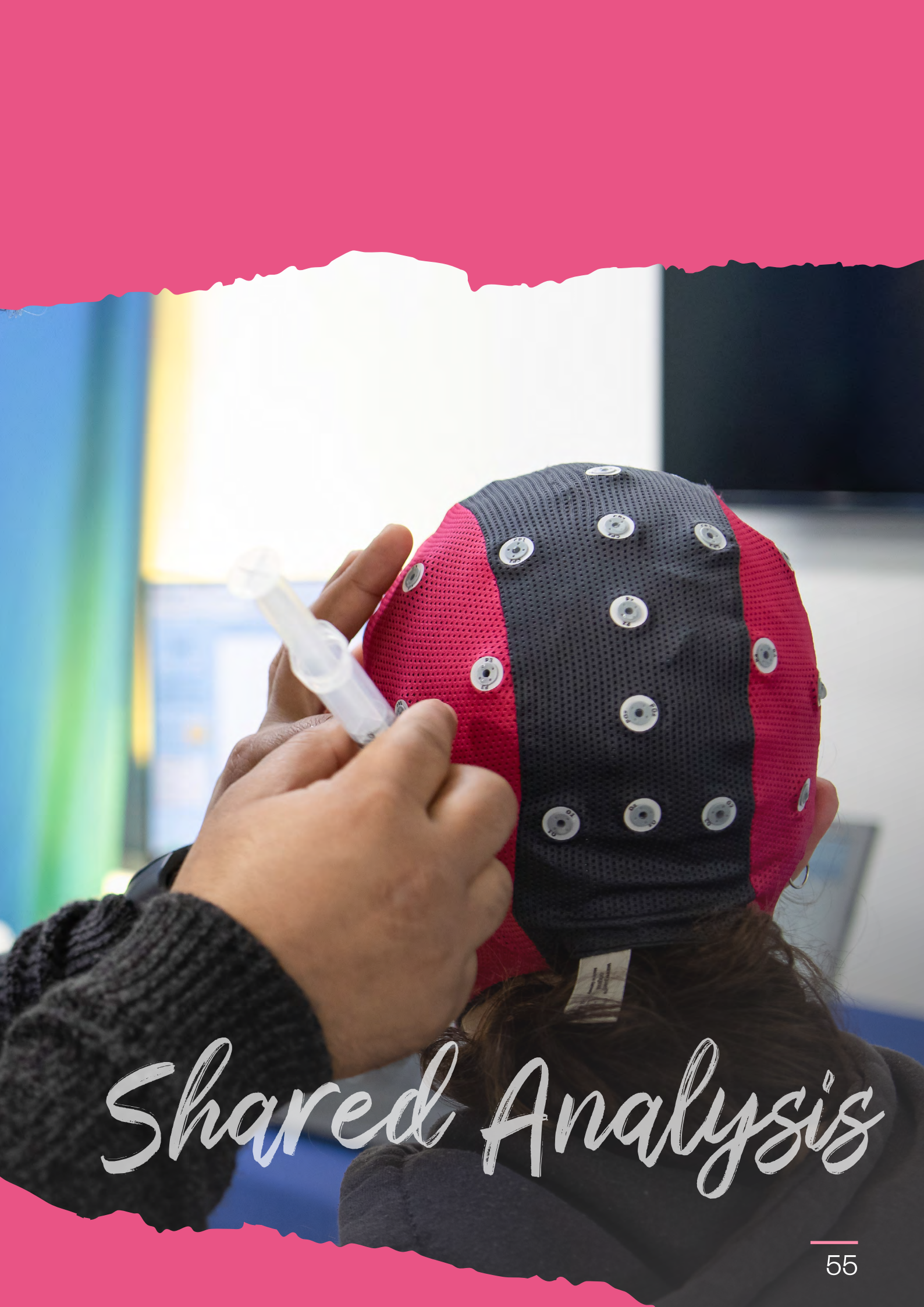


Pic: *The Ties That Bind*
(Creative Communities on a Shared Island)

5. Pillar-Specific Analysis - How the Creative Ireland Shared Island Story Plays Out



Pic: *Divergently Together*
(Creative Climate Action Fund II - Agents for Change)



Shared Analysis

5. Pillar-Specific Analysis - How the Creative Ireland Shared Island Story Plays Out

This section examines how the cross-cutting themes from Section 4 manifest within each of the pillars of the Creative Ireland Shared Island initiatives. It provides an overview of the distinct challenges and opportunities within the Creative Communities, Creative Climate Action and Sustainability, Creative Youth, and Creative Health and Wellbeing pillars.

The analysis highlights how creative approaches were used to address complex social issues, build all-island relationships, and foster mutual understanding across communities. It also examines the logistical, administrative, and cultural barriers encountered in implementing all-island projects.

By exploring each pillar in depth, this section provides a comprehensive view of how the Shared Island initiative manifested across different sectors and demographics, offering insights into both the challenges and potential of using creativity to build connections across the island of Ireland.

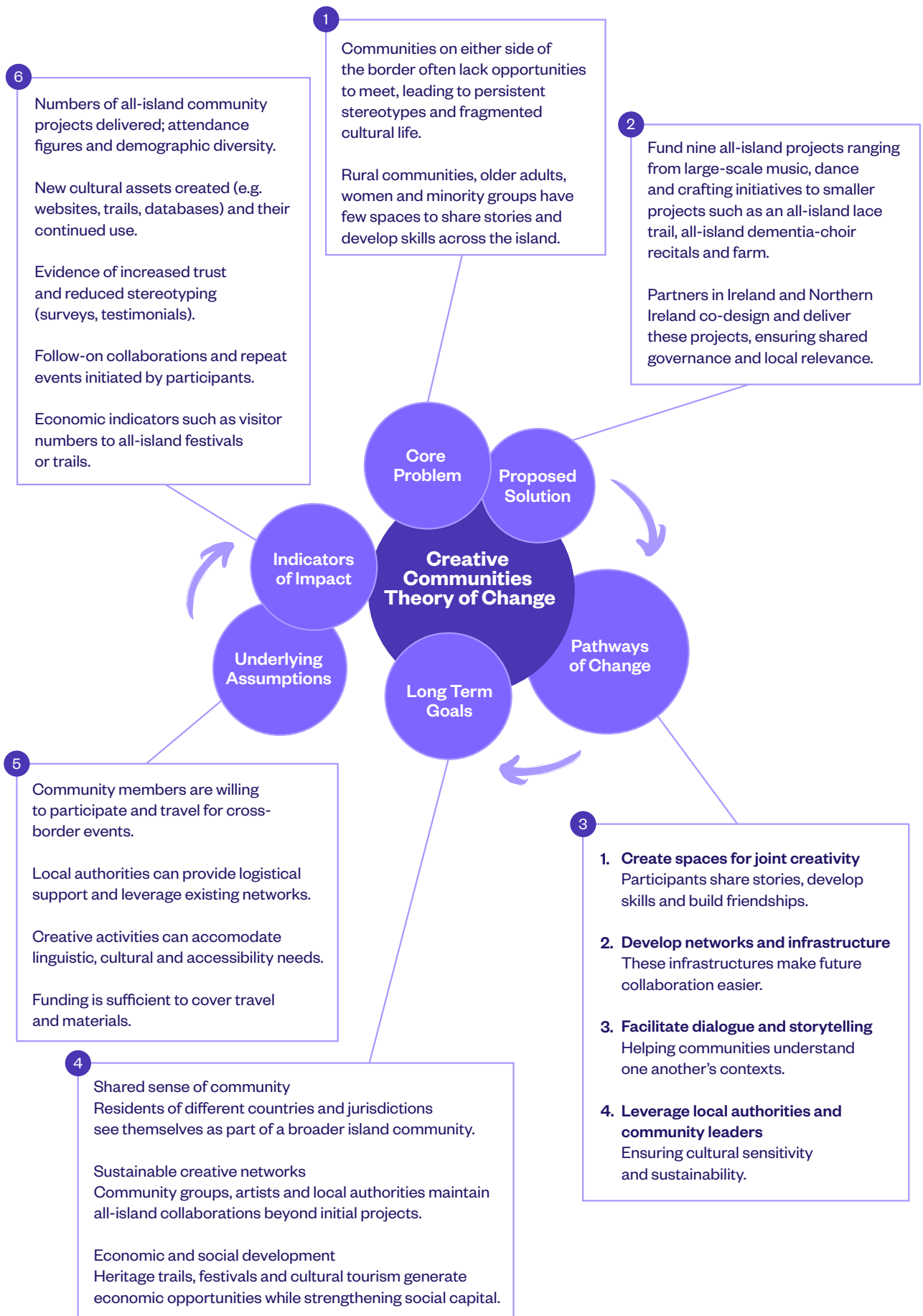
For each pillar, the section outlines a pillar specific theory of change and pillar-specific insights on implementation and outcomes.

Creative Communities Pillar

On an all-island basis, Creative Communities on A Shared Island brings people together to harness local creativity as a driver of resilience, identity and connection. By supporting local authorities and community groups across the island, this pillar enables place-based collaboration, where creative projects act as bridges across borders, strengthen community bonds and promote inclusion. In doing so, it fosters a shared cultural confidence that values both diversity and common ground.

The theory of change for this pillar is outlined below. This theory of change was developed by the evaluation team using desk research.

Figure 9: Creative Communities Theory of Change



Pillar-Specific Insights

Projects in this pillar focused on bringing diverse communities together through shared creative and cultural interests, such as farming, lacemaking, dance and industrial heritage. The distinct issues revolved around building trust in post-conflict contexts, navigating different administrative systems between local authorities, and the challenge of engaging younger generations in traditional crafts.

Building Trust and Navigating Division

While many projects found that nationalism and unionism “just never came up in discussion”, there was an underlying need to build trust carefully. In the *Shared Histories: Diverse Views* project, a “whatever you say, say nothing” attitude was a cultural hesitancy that had to be overcome for participants to share personal stories. The *Birds of a Feather* project highlighted the importance of thoughtful relationship building when new team members join all-island initiatives. As with any project operating across different cultural and political contexts, time was invested in ensuring shared understanding, clarity of purpose and a sense of inclusion for all staff involved. *The Ties That Bind* used the 12th of July not as a point of division but as an opportunity for cultural exchange and conversation in Ballydehob.

Administrative and Logistical Barriers

A universal challenge was navigating the different administrative, procurement, and governance systems between Ireland and Northern Ireland. Waterford and Mid and East Antrim councils had different structures for communications and procurement, which caused delays. All-island travel was a significant logistical barrier, particularly for older participants in the *Laces of Ireland* and *Birds of a Feather* projects.

Safeguarding rules created barriers when Syrian women from Ballinasloe wanted to bring their children on a visit to Belfast.

Ensuring diverse participation often brought unforeseen costs, especially in providing transport and support for those with reduced mobility or health needs, highlighting not only the resources required to make inclusion meaningful but also the importance of flexible funding structures that can adapt to such needs as they arise.

Inclusion and Succession in Heritage Crafts

Projects centred on traditional crafts like lacemaking faced the dual challenge of being inclusive while ensuring the craft’s survival. The demographic for *Laces of Ireland* was primarily older women, highlighting the urgent need to engage younger generations and broaden gender participation to ensure the craft’s continuity.

While the core engagement was successful, the project team noted that engaging men and younger people remained an “unmet opportunity and challenge”. A significant achievement was empowering the lacemaking groups to be seen as experts advising museums, shifting their status from “amateur” to expert knowledge holders.

Alongside the challenges outlined above, projects also generated wider impacts that deserve recognition. The breadth of project outputs from festivals and exhibitions to craft trails and digital archives further demonstrates the scale of community creativity. Importantly, participants, particularly in heritage crafts, shifted from being seen as hobbyists to recognised experts, this all built confidence and capacity for communities to self-advocate at local, policy, and international levels.

Multigenerational and Cross-Cultural Dialogues

Although projects had a **multigenerational element** (particularly *Farm Walks*, where grandparents, parents and children were involved), some of the projects skewed towards older participant cohorts. Where projects focused on a specific craft, artform or sector

(e.g. lacemaking), the participant base naturally reflected that of the wider craft or sector, and projects made efforts to broaden the participation to other groups.

Ensuring the inclusion of a diverse range of people led to **unforeseen project costs related to logistics and transport** of people with limited mobility or reduced physical health.

Fostering dialogue across generations and cultures created opportunities where people of different ages and cultural backgrounds came together to share experiences and learn from each other in ways that don't usually happen. In *Farm Walks* where grandparents, parents, and children worked side by side, and with *Birds of a Feather* where Syrian women shared traditions through craft and food. These exchanges turned creative activity into a common language, bridging age, culture, and community.

Capacity Building

Projects have led to wider impact, changes in self-perception, and increased community capacity to self-advocate. Where craft skills risk being perceived as a leisure activity or an amateur endeavour, projects allowed participants to view themselves as experts in their given field. Coalescing goals and endeavours as a group builds confidence and a platform to reposition themselves and

engage more broadly with institutions, at policy level, and internationally (e.g. *Laces of Ireland, Farm Walks*).

Creative Climate Action and Sustainability Pillar

'Creative Climate Action Fund II – Agents for Change supports projects that connect people across the island with the urgency of climate change through culture and creativity. By funding collaborative initiatives between artists, scientists, communities and local authorities in both jurisdictions, it encourages dialogue, shared learning and behaviour change. In the context of a shared island, this pillar not only builds capacity for low-carbon communities but also deepens North–South cooperation on one of the most pressing challenges of our time.

The theory of change for this pillar is outlined below. This theory of change was developed by the evaluation team using desk research.

Pic: *Creative Boardroom: Collaborate4Climate* (*Creative Climate Action Fund II - Agents for Change*)



Sustainability Pillars

The Built Environment

Between 2002 and 2022, the island of Ireland experienced a 26% increase in population

- Northern Ireland needs to build 100,000 new homes by 2039 to accommodate its growing population.
- The sector accounts for roughly 15% of total NI emissions.
- Ireland's built environment treats 3.5 million tonnes of mineral waste over half (52%) of the total waste treated in Ireland.

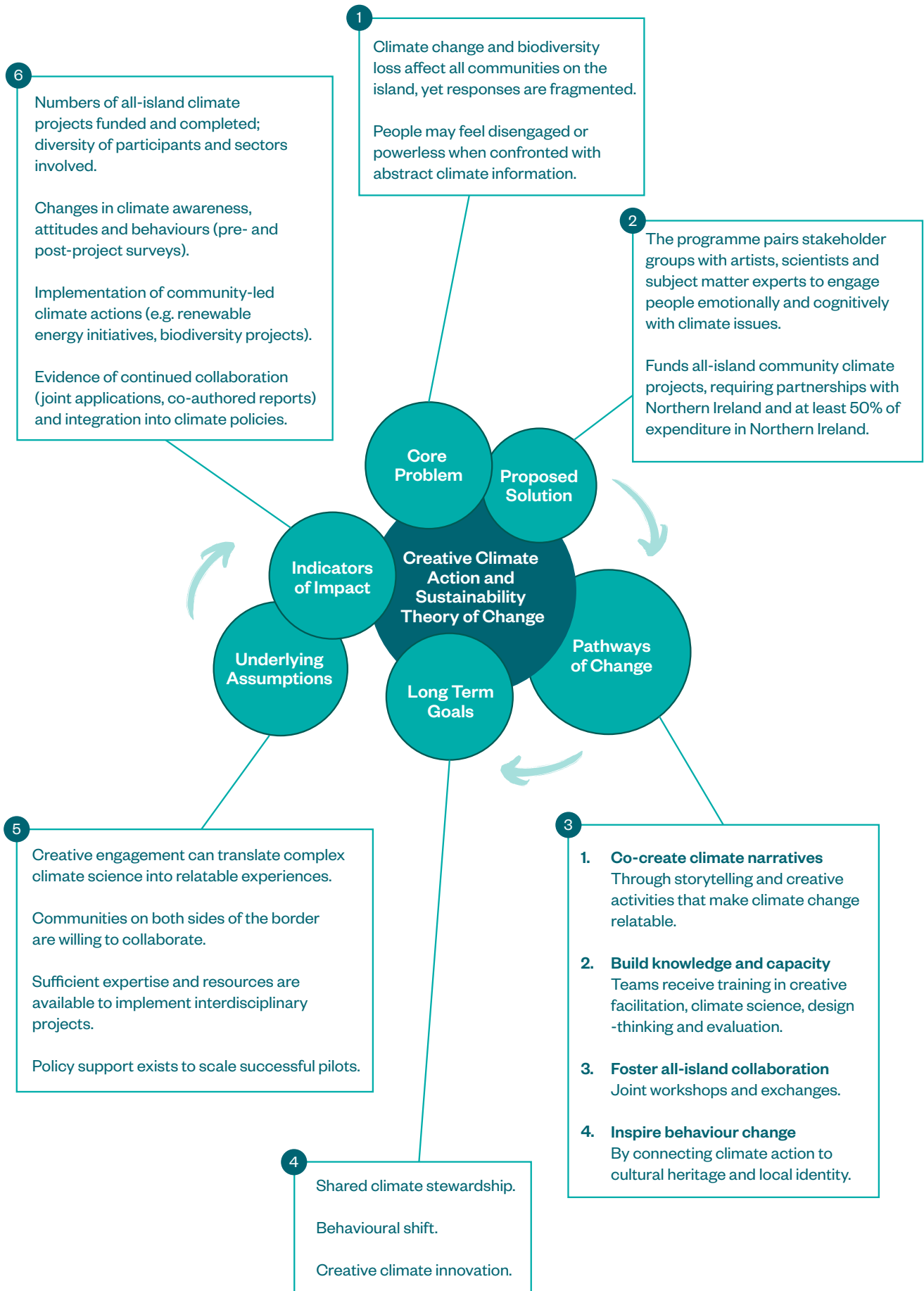


Consumables

- In 2021, 63.2% of UK packaging waste was recycled, meaning over 4 million tonnes still went to landfill or incineration.
- In the UK alone, 300,000 tonnes of clothing waste is produced annually, equivalent to a landfill site the size of a small village.
- In Northern Ireland, an estimated 27,000 tonnes of textiles are discarded annually, with about 582 tons thrown away each week. A significant portion, around 30%, of this textile waste ends up in landfills.



Figure 10: Creative Climate Action and Sustainability Theory of Change



Pillar-Specific Insights

The Creative Climate Action and Sustainability projects used creativity to address environmental challenges from an all-island perspective, recognising that climate change “does not consider boundaries on a map”. Distinct issues included the lack of disability inclusion in climate policy, differing regulatory contexts between Northern Ireland and Ireland and the challenge of translating awareness into tangible behavioural change.

Intersectionality, Inclusion and Accessibility

A core issue for the *Divergently Together* project was the profound lack of disability and neurodivergent inclusion in the climate sector. There is very little awareness, even within disabled communities, that they are “statistically the higher proportion of people who are at risk of fatality during extreme weather events”.

A key barrier was designing an “inclusive project in a non-inclusive space,” as systems from government to project funding are not neurodivergent-friendly.

Language itself was a barrier, requiring the project to work across English, Irish, British Sign Language (BSL), and Irish Sign Language (ISL).

All-island Regulatory and Data Gaps

The projects highlighted systemic differences between the two jurisdictions. The *Creative Boardroom: Collaborate4Climate* project found “very limited data from a Northern Irish context” on climate statistics, as it is often centralised through the UK. This made an all-island perspective challenging to research.

Both Northern Ireland and Ireland operate in different regulatory contexts with different timelines for legislation, though there is still significant all-island collaboration between agencies. County councils and climate officers in Northern Ireland were perceived as being “more strapped for time and resources” than their counterparts in Ireland.

Bridging Intergenerational and Disciplinary Divides

The projects successfully used creative methods to connect different groups who do not normally interact.

Creative Boardroom: Collaborate4Climate brought senior-level directors and design students together. Initially, students were “very intimidated,” but the creative, hands-on workshops levelled the playing field and broke down barriers. The creative framing gave directors a “space to be able to share without having a [work] agenda to get through”.

The *Shifting Tides* project used artists as “trusted brokers” to connect oyster farmers, scuba divers, scientists, and policymakers, groups that previously had operated independently.

Long Term Impact

Communities across Ireland and Northern Ireland jointly steward shared natural resources and advocate for island-wide climate policies. In bringing diverse stakeholder groups together, creativity was used as a leveller, creating a safe point of entry to complex, systems-level subject matter. Creative framing allows participants to engage at an individual and community level with broad topics and created spaces for learning and exchange.

Projects provided spacious containers for participants to self-direct and follow emerging interests, where project coordinators facilitated and encouraged non-prescriptive collaboration between participants and artists or subject matter experts.

Climate Anxiety

Learning about and discussing the climate crisis can be difficult for participants, particularly for those who are (or could be) disproportionately impacted by its consequences (e.g. people with disabilities). Beyond education and awareness building (e.g. via exhibition, walks, podcast), projects created new capability to take climate action through increasing advocacy ability, connecting stakeholder groups, feeding into ongoing research, and acting as a platform for groups to secure additional funding.

The behaviour change focus of this pillar is reflected in the initial call-out, which recognises the importance of project management, facilitation and impact evaluation in achieving long-term impact, engagement and reach. Interviewees recognised the limitations of a two-year project in that context, but, from the outset, focussed on setting up linkages that could perpetuate beyond the lifetime of the project.

Creative Youth Pillar

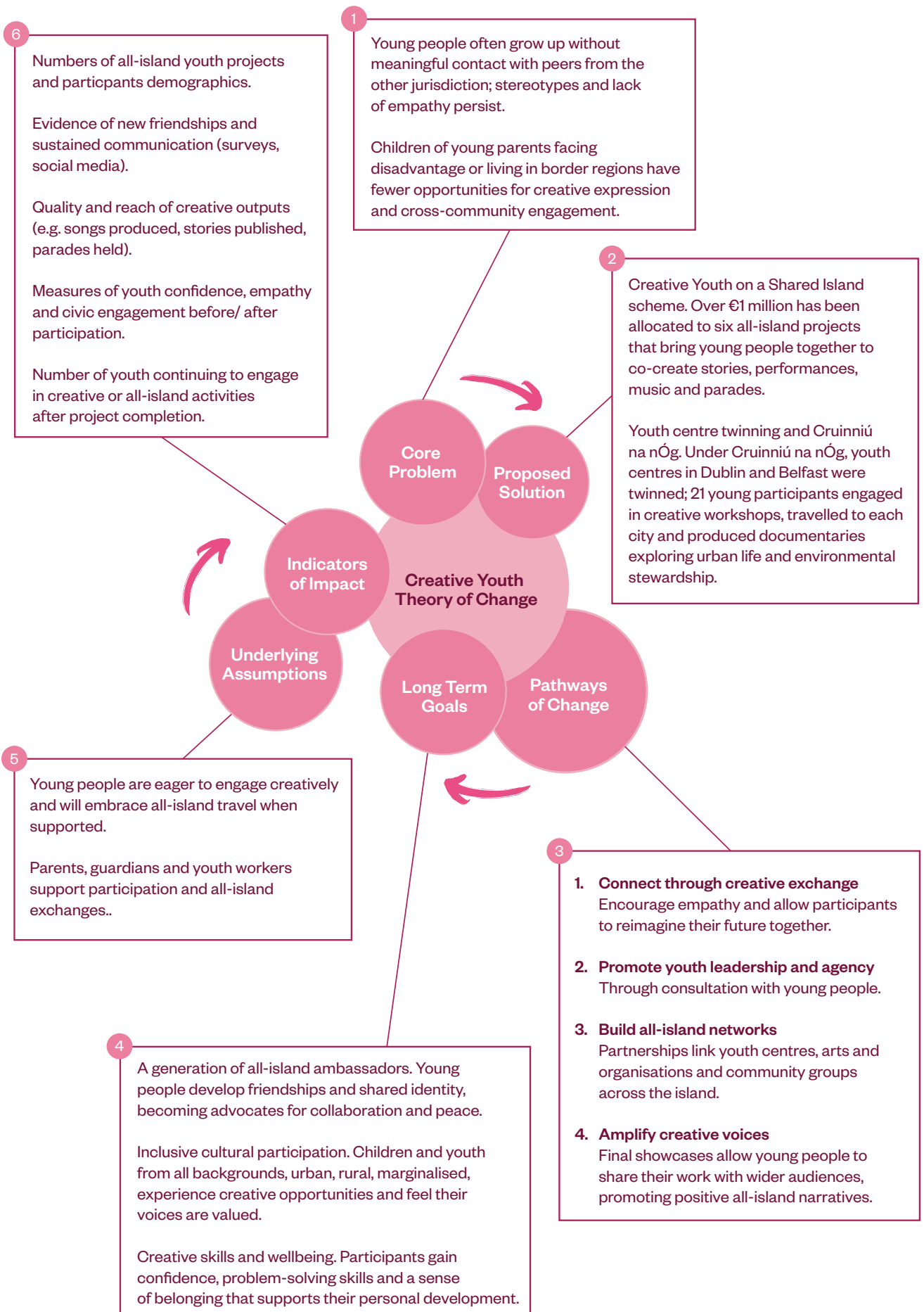
Creative Youth on a Shared Island seeks to ensure that every child and young person, regardless of where they live or their background, can experience creativity as part of their education and daily life. Through all-island programmes, festivals and collaborative projects, Creative Ireland creates opportunities for young people on both sides of the border to learn together, build friendships, and imagine a shared future. This pillar positions creativity as a tool for reconciliation and empowerment, helping the next generation to see creativity as central to their lives and collective wellbeing on a shared island basis.

The theory of change for this pillar is outlined below. This theory of change was developed by the evaluation team using desk research.

Pic: Shifting Tides and Sea Change: Creative Coastal Communities (Creative Climate Action Fund II - Agents for Change)



Figure 11: Creative Youth Theory of Change



Pillar-Specific Insights

Projects under the Creative Youth on a Shared Island initiative focused on creative development, all-island relationship building, and personal growth for young people aged 14-24. Key issues of note included navigating cultural differences, addressing systemic imbalances between jurisdictions, and the logistical challenges of facilitating youth exchanges.

Engaging hard-to-reach youth, particularly those not already involved in mainstream activities, presented a significant challenge. Building trust and overcoming initial reluctance to connect required careful planning and sensitive facilitation.

The projects highlighted the need for sufficient time to build relationships and foster a sense of shared purpose before focusing on creative outputs. There was also a need to balance the desire for youth-led initiatives with the practicalities of project management and delivery. The impact of Brexit and reduced all-island interaction among young people was also a significant factor. Other issues included:

Cultural and Historical Disparities

A significant issue was the profound difference in lived experience between young people from Ireland and Northern Ireland. Participants from Ireland often had a “blissful ignorance” about the Troubles. In contrast, young people from Northern Ireland lived in a landscape where they felt they had to “watch what they say, make sure what they say is neutral”.

Initial interactions sometimes involved stereotypical “banter,” with participants using phrases like “up the Ra” or “Taigs” with an ignorance of its impact. However, these stereotypes were often “left behind once they got to know the actual people”.

Imbalance in Support and Opportunity

There was a clear partnership imbalance noted by organisers. Organisers from Ireland became aware of the significant pressure and scrutiny faced by their Northern Ireland counterparts, who seemed to have a “tougher time” and were “holding an awful lot more”. This required providing additional support to Northern Ireland partners to build trust and empower them as co-leads.

A notable disparity existed in arts and music education. The system in Northern Ireland has “fallen by the wayside”, in terms of funding, while access in Ireland has become stronger. This manifested in participants from Northern Ireland having less prior engagement and being more self-taught compared to their counterparts from Ireland.

Due to Brexit, young people in Northern Ireland do not have the same access to European exchange opportunities as those in Ireland. Additionally, young people in Direct Provision in Ireland were unable to travel across the border at all.

Logistical and Recruitment Challenges

Facilitating all-island youth work presented practical hurdles. Recruitment in Northern Ireland proved much more difficult than in Ireland. The youth infrastructure in Northern Ireland is seen as “relatively fragile” and over-saturated with initiatives from funders like PeacePlus, creating limited “bandwidth” for new projects.

Travel was a significant challenge, with public transport proving difficult and impacting artistic work, necessitating a shift to private coaches. Organisers for projects like *Creative Connections - Shared Writing Across the Island* noted that operating across two jurisdictions is like running “international projects” due to different currencies and legislative frameworks.

Reach and Access

Accessing young people proved difficult for some projects. This is attributed to individuals' ability to commit to longer-term projects or those which involve travel, conflicts with other commitments (especially in Northern Ireland), differing school terms across jurisdictions, the inability of young people in Direct Provision to cross the border for residential, and hesitation around cross-community travel and engagement. Where partner organisations have existing connections with cohorts of young people, this ameliorated these issues to an extent and allowed projects to recruit participants relatively quickly.

Differences in Ability, Experience and Confidence

When bringing groups together, differences in ability, experience and confidence become apparent. Where this led to an unevenness in willingness to participate, successful strategies included adjusting the project pace, modifying planned activities, and identifying and responding to participant interests. As one project lead noted: "the most empowering thing is for a young person to be listened to and not coerced." Additionally, Youth Advisory Panels (YAPs) allowed young people to lead on the design of events and give them a sense of empowerment and self-determination.

The shift from reluctance to full engagement and empowerment was noted as a significant success. Where participant groups (in Northern Ireland) have existing relationships with social workers who were able to accompany them to events, it was noted that this had a positive effect on integrating groups, reducing apprehension and assisting in the overall enjoyment of residential.

Trust-building and Vulnerability

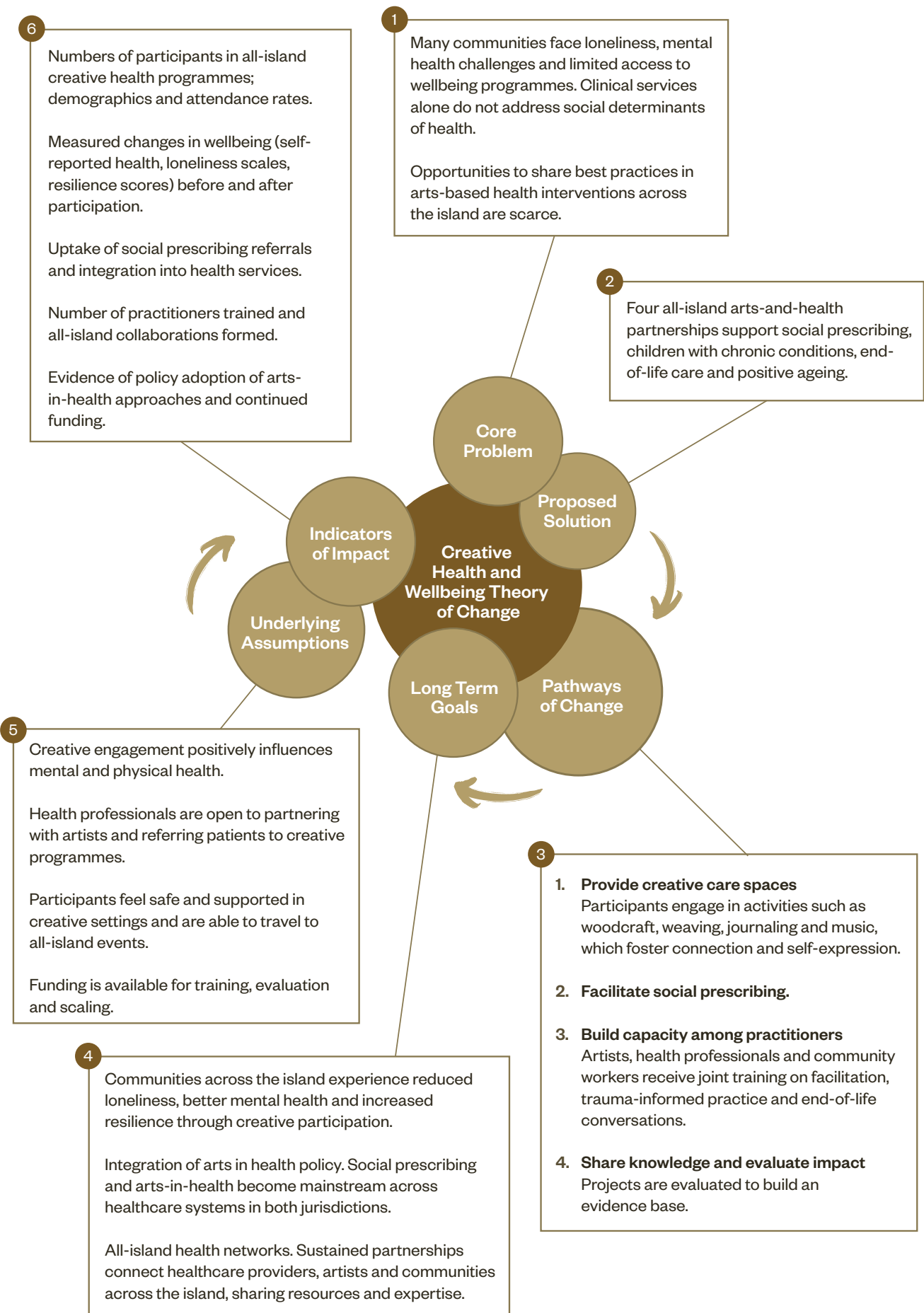
Each of the projects centred on art forms and formats which inherently require and facilitate trust-building and vulnerability (theatre, writing, parade, storytelling, songwriting etc.). Though working collaboratively, participants took creative risks in creating and sharing their work with peers and mentors. Often, they shared deeply personal experiences via the creative medium. This led to rapid relationship building, creative development and increased self-confidence.

The social aspect of in-person events (e.g. multi-day residential, hothouses) allows for decompression, informal conversation and organic friendship building across groups. All-island and cross-community groups are more interested in the differences and similarities in their day-to-day lived experiences than historical and political divisions but were facilitated through any difficult discussions where needed and relevant. They found common ground in their experiences as young people growing up on the same island in the current political and economic climate, and in discussing their futures.

Creative Health and Wellbeing Pillar

The Health and Wellbeing in the Community fund harnesses arts and culture to promote better health outcomes across the island, recognising that creative participation can reduce isolation, enhance resilience and support recovery. With all-island projects ranging from social prescribing to mental health initiatives, this pillar demonstrates how creativity can transcend divides, offering inclusive ways to connect people, improve wellbeing and strengthen the social fabric of communities North and South. The theory of change for this pillar is outlined below. This theory of change was developed by the evaluation team using desk research.

Figure 12: Creative Health and Wellbeing Theory of Change



Pillar-Specific Insights

Projects in this pillar used creative activities to improve mental health, reduce isolation, and build community connections, often targeting specific groups like those living with dementia or participants referred through social prescribing. Key issues included adapting activities for participants with complex needs, the precariousness of community-based service funding, and navigating the ethics of evaluation with vulnerable groups.

Adapting to Vulnerable Participants' Needs

A central issue was ensuring activities were genuinely inclusive and beneficial for participants with significant health challenges.

The Art of Life project, dealing with the sensitive topic of death and dying, had to overcome cultural taboos and participant misconceptions that the workshops would be “morbid” or “depressing”. The *Creative Cafés* project worked with social prescribing clients, including some with intellectual impairments and low literacy, requiring careful, non-intrusive evaluation methods.

Funding and Systemic Inconsistencies

There were notable differences in how health and community services are structured and funded across jurisdictions. The social prescribing model in Northern Ireland was severely impacted by the collapse of government, with the system collapsing from a planned 27 centres to only four, leaving many link officers in precarious, project-funded roles.

The *Weaving Worlds* project noted that without Creative Ireland funding, the Family Resource Centres and Healthy Living Centres would have no budget for creative activities to promote engagement.

A challenge in *The Art of Life* project was that work in Northern Ireland can be “very much slower” due to more rigid community planning targets, making partnerships more difficult to establish unless a project fits perfectly within existing frameworks.

Creativity as a Bridge for Difficult Conversations

The creative process was a vital tool for dialogue on sensitive topics. In *The Art of Life* project, creative activities served as a “bridge” to discuss end-of-life planning. One participant was able to talk to her 18-year-old about the topic for the first time by “using the creative aspects” of the project.

Pic: *Circus Explored*
(*Cruinniú na nÓg*)



6. Evaluation Insights - The Impact of All-Island Creative Collaboration



Pic: *Shifting Tides and Sea Change: Creative Coastal Communities*
(Creative Climate Action Fund II - Agents for Change)



Shared Insights

6. Evaluation Insights - The Impact of All-Island Creative Collaboration

This section draws together insights from the evaluation of the Creative Ireland Shared Island initiative, highlighting how creativity is functioning as a catalyst for social change, reconciliation, and resilience.

The insights show that all-island projects do more than deliver cultural activities. They create rehearsal spaces for shared futures, strengthen networks across communities, and embed wellbeing, inclusivity, and sustainability as drivers of progress. By examining impact narratives and exploring approaches such as Social Return on Investment (SROI), the evaluation begins to capture the wider social, cultural, and economic value of the programme, offering a foundation for understanding both its immediate achievements and its long-term potential.

The Creative Ireland Shared Island initiative shows how creativity can be a catalyst for social change, reconciliation, and resilience.

“Many farms involved in the project span three generations, with grandparents, parents, and children working together and participating.”

By investing in all-island projects that encourage imaginative expression, support sensitive conversations, and experiment with new ways of working together, the programme creates space for communities to reimagine shared futures, develop new cultural ecosystems, and strengthen their resilience by building relationships.

Reimagining social and societal goals requires a shared vision of wellbeing that bridges divisions and speaks to the realities of life across the island. Creative Ireland Shared Island projects create opportunities for people to rehearse these futures.

Youth-led programmes, for instance, have given young people the tools to imagine themselves as co-creators of change. Initiatives such as Story Seeds, songwriting residencies, and parades encourage cultural connection and pride of place, helping young people imagine what it means to live on an island that is both diverse and interconnected.

These projects fostered creative expression, personal development, self-confidence, and social bonding, often by targeting marginalised or harder-to-reach young people. These projects emphasised youth worker support, developing leadership through programs like “aspiring leaders,” and using residencies guided by Youth Advisory Committees to ensure relevance.

Other creative initiatives, including the Shared Island strand of Cruinniú na nÓg, bring young people together to explore environmental and cultural issues, using creative play to imagine sustainable futures.

These activities replace divisive stereotypes with shared narratives and provide rehearsal spaces where creativity informs how society itself is imagined. Over time, such projects help shift public goals, embedding wellbeing, inclusivity, and sustainability as central drivers of progress

Developing new cultural ecosystems on a Shared Island is vital.

For decades, cultural infrastructure has been organised within jurisdictions, limiting the flow of ideas and resources across the border. Creative Ireland has deliberately set out to change this by cultivating networks that link local authorities, creatives, communities, and institutions across the island. The Creative Communities on a Shared Island initiative supports partnerships between Ireland’s thirty-one local authorities and organisations in the cultural sector, youth sector, health and in some instances local authorities in Northern Ireland and Britain, providing both large and small grants to sustain existing collaborations and seed new ones.

These partnerships draw in a diverse range of organisations including youth groups, arts institutions, research bodies, charities, and social enterprises, ensuring that new cultural ecosystems are broad-based and resilient.

This ecosystem building has been reinforced by the allocation of Shared Island funding, which signals political recognition that cultural cooperation and interdependence are central to building a shared future.

The outcome is a new cultural landscape in which resources, expertise, and relationships circulate more freely, enabling innovation and creating an all-island ecosystem that can drive inclusion, economic development, and reconciliation.

Resilience emerges through the relationships nurtured by creative projects.

Trust is built in residencies and exchanges where artists and communities from different backgrounds come together, often reporting a deeper understanding of one another and new friendships that last well beyond the project itself.

Music and performance, such as the dementia-inclusive choirs in Larne and Dublin, show how creativity can simultaneously foster cultural understanding and provide wellbeing support. Capacity development is another aspect of resilience, as artists, facilitators, and communities acquire new skills in collaboration, facilitation, and trauma-informed practice.

Through initiatives like Creative Climate Action and Sustainability, participants also gain civic confidence, learning to use creative approaches to engage with climate change, health inequalities, and other shared challenges. Storytelling projects, placemaking initiatives, and immersive arts interventions provide prototypes of solutions while deepening the networks of trust and collaboration that communities rely upon in times of uncertainty.

What emerges from this phase of the fund is a vision of resilience grounded in human connection. Cross-community friendships, enhanced skills, and collaborative networks create the conditions for cultural participation to become part of everyday life. This human infrastructure provides the foundation for adaptive capacity in the face of environmental, political, and social change.

The Shared Island Creative Ireland initiative demonstrates that creativity offers rehearsal spaces for new societal visions, builds durable cultural ecosystems that transcend borders, and strengthens resilience by leveraging relationships. Together these achievements show how creativity can operate as a strategic enabler of peace, reconciliation, and shared progress for all communities, across every pillar of the programme.

7. Recommendations - Lessons for Future Iterations of All-Island Creative Funding



Pic: *Divergently Together*
(Creative Climate Action Fund II - Agents for Change)

Shared Experience



7. Recommendations - Lessons for Future Iterations of All-Island Creative Funding

The evaluation identified several key lessons for Creative Ireland regarding project timelines, funding structures, administrative requirements, and the need for flexibility. Some of the recommendations are addressing the need to continue with current approaches that are highly valued. These lessons are crucial for ensuring the success and sustainability of future Shared Island initiatives.

Project Timelines and Planning Phases

A consistent theme across multiple projects is that the timeframes for all-island work are often underestimated, particularly the initial relationship-building phase.

Invest in Upfront Relationship Building

Organisers strongly advise that funders recognise and resource an adequate planning and partnership-building phase before project delivery begins. One project lead noted that spending time at the outset to “build the partnership and invest time in the relationship” made “such a difference” to planning properly. Another recommended allowing at least three months of detailed planning before delivery starts. False starts with partners can happen, and this initial period is crucial for finding the right fit and building the trust necessary for successful collaboration.

Encourage New or Expanded Partnerships

Many projects have naturally clustered in border regions and urban centres and made use of existing partnerships. The spatial analysis also highlighted the significant distances between project teams and sites, adding to the unique contribution of the Creative Ireland Shared initiative towards all-island social cohesion. Additional potential for impact may lie in fostering partnerships that connect communities across contrasting geographies, histories, and social conditions. Future funding calls could consider encouraging applicants to form partnerships with different communities (rural/urban, migrant/indigenous, youth/elderly, etc.), or organisations working in differing socio-economic areas.

Recognise the Complexity of All-island Work

Many projects found that the two-year timeframe was tight for the complexity involved in building trust, co-designing, delivering, and evaluating across two jurisdictions. The need to navigate different systems, build relationships from scratch, and support vulnerable participants means that progress can be slower than in single-jurisdiction projects. One organiser noted that “building respect and trust with communities is a slow process and shouldn’t be rushed”.

Short Funding Windows Create Pressure

The timing of funding announcements and the pressure to spend funds within a calendar year created significant challenges. One project received funding in late summer with an expectation to spend it by November, creating immense pressure to rush activities rather than delivering them in a “meaningful way”. Another pointed out the challenge of short six-week application windows, which make it “very difficult to get into negotiations with organisations and partners”. Administrative and cross-jurisdictional complexities slow down projects, making short cycles unrealistic.

Funding Structures and Financial Processes

A notable burden highlighted is the requirement to pay for activities upfront and then seek reimbursement. This cash-flow model may actively exclude smaller organisations with limited capital, undermining equitable access to funding. In addition to this, navigating all-island costs introduces complexities like managing currency exchange, reconciling different mileage rates, and complying with varied legal, procurement, insurance, and health and safety regulations across the two jurisdictions. These challenges force projects to function essentially as “international projects”, diverting time and adding administrative workload. This implicitly highlights the need to continue and enhance the requirement for dedicated project management support.

Reimbursement Model is a Major Barrier

The structure of funding drawdowns and the need to account for specific all-island costs emerged as significant practical issues. The requirement for organisations to pay for large expenses like residentials upfront and then be reimbursed was identified as a major obstacle. One project lead stated this model could “take an awful lot of people off the table,” excluding smaller but “fantastic organisations” that lack the cashflow to front such costs. This financial model creates a significant barrier to entry and may perpetuate exclusion of marginalised or precarious partners.

Provide Budget Lines for Essential Roles

A recurring theme was the absence of budget lines for essential roles, for example the roles of project manager or administrator where not always explicitly funded. Multiple projects highlighted that dedicated administrative support is critical but often not explicitly funded. Organisers advised that future funding should include budget lines for project managers or administrators to handle the complex coordination, logistics, and financial reporting involved, especially in multi-strand projects.

Acknowledge and Fund Inclusive Practices

Projects also emphasised the need to acknowledge and fund inclusive practices. Effective inclusion for participants with diverse needs (e.g., mobility issues, interpreters for deaf participants or different sign languages, dietary requirements, mental health support) incurs additional, often unforeseen, costs. Funders should ensure budgets can accommodate these essential costs to remove barriers to participation.

Additional Funding and Flexibility is Highly Valued

When Creative Ireland offered additional, unprompted funding to projects to cover rising costs, it was described as “amazing”. This proactive support demonstrates an understanding of real-world project challenges and a commitment to their success.

Administrative Requirements

Navigating two different sets of administrative, legal, and financial systems is a universal challenge that funders could help mitigate.

Provide Cross-Jurisdictional Guidance

Projects essentially run as “international projects” due to different currencies, procurement rules, insurance, and legal frameworks. Funders could provide guidance or facilitation support on navigating these differences to minimise confusion and delays. Issues such as differing tax ID requirements and mileage calculations created significant administrative burdens that could be streamlined with clearer upfront information.

Streamline Reporting and Evaluation

While evaluation is crucial, having multiple layers (internal, external, and funder-led) can be onerous for participants and organisers. Participants in one project felt they were being “asked the same question multiple times”. Aligning evaluation processes would be beneficial. There is a need for flexibility of approach, projects must be able to adapt their evaluation methods to suit the people they are working with.

The Need for Flexibility

The ability for projects to adapt to emerging needs and unexpected opportunities was seen as a cornerstone of success.

Trust Grantees to Adapt

The most successful projects were those that could pivot in response to participants’ needs, such as changing creative outputs or altering residential plans. Creative Ireland were praised because they trust grantees to make these adjustments, with one organiser noting Creative Ireland “absolutely are fine with whatever the outcome,” valuing the journey over a “big shiny thing”.

Support Longer-Term Vision and Sustainability

Many organisers expressed a desire for continuity and longer-term planning beyond the initial funding period. Projects build significant momentum and relationships, and short-term funding cycles can lead to a “stop-start” dynamic, raising and then disappointing community expectations. A prominent theme across interviews was the strong desire for projects to continue, largely driven by the positive experiences and perceived impact on participants and communities. This desire often stemmed from the joy and connection fostered by the activities.

The interviews also revealed the widely understood systemic challenge of translating this enthusiasm into stable, long-term funding. The underlying issue is a mismatch between the short-term, project-based funding models and the long-term, relational nature of effective all-island and community-led initiatives.

There are a range of practical steps that can be reviewed such as bridging funding gaps between project cycles to prevent the loss of momentum and relationships built, increase focus on projects developing clear sustainability plans, including strategies for continued engagement, and retaining the value of non-traditional outcomes such as “joy,” “fun,” and “emotional impact” as these are often the true drivers of long-term engagement and wellbeing.

Trauma-Informed Practice

Each project had specific barriers, including participant vulnerability, additional needs, trauma, and PTSD, highlighting that participants required significant support and that the project needed to be able to access these supports or, at the very least, signpost participants to the services they required.

In some projects, participants needed emotional support due to trauma, grief, or vulnerability. Guidance could include where project teams can access to professional wellbeing, counselling, or trauma-informed facilitation training for project teams.

Structured knowledge-sharing across projects

Facilitate Cross-Project Learning

Several project leads suggested that Creative Ireland could facilitate more opportunities for funded projects to connect, share experiences, and learn from one another. Organising at least one meeting per year for local authority-led projects, for instance, would build a valuable community of practice.

Good Practice

Structured knowledge-sharing allows good practice to spread more widely, avoids duplication of effort, and strengthens the impact of individual projects by situating them within a bigger island-wide picture. It also supports capacity-building by giving smaller or newer organisations access to the insights and strategies of more established partners. Over time, this collective learning fosters resilience, as lessons learned in one place can be adapted and applied elsewhere.

Evaluation

Project evaluators expressed a desire to learn from each other and share methodologies. While there is unlikely going to be a single evaluation framework for all projects, advice can be provided in consistent data collection standards, use of validated instruments reasonable standards of evaluation.

Shared Data Bank

Creative Ireland could hold a centralised repository of case studies, toolkits, evaluation reports, and creative methods drawn from each funded project. Supplementing this with facilitated workshops, peer-learning sessions, and thematic working groups (e.g. inclusion, evaluation, administration) would deepen the exchange of practical knowledge. Over time, these structures could help to create a sustainable network of all-island practitioners with the confidence and evidence base to influence wider cultural policy.

8. Project Guidance - Considerations for Future Shared Island Projects



Pic: *The Ties That Bind*
(Creative Communities on a Shared Island)

Shared Future



8. Project Guidance - Considerations for Future Shared Island Projects

This section draws on insights from the interim evaluation of the Shared Island initiative and a detailed review of individual final project evaluation reports. It outlines how projects navigated the practical dimensions of Shared Island working and presents a practical guide for future funded projects. It sets out the approaches that proved effective, identifies recurring difficulties, and offers practical guidance so that future projects can draw on this collective experience.

Projects encountered a consistent set of practical challenges e.g.

- how to communicate across cultural and linguistic differences,
- how to engage diverse and often hard-to-reach participants,
- how to manage budgets that account for the full effort of all-island logistics,
- how to comply with differing legislative frameworks, how to move people safely and inclusively across the island,
- how to build partnerships, and
- how to evaluate all-island creative projects.

The sections that follow expand on each of these themes, setting out what worked in practice, the challenges encountered, and the key lessons to inform future project design and delivery.

Planning for Language Differences

Creative Ireland Shared Island projects worked across cultural and regional differences including formal language, accent, dialect, idiom, and the unspoken assumptions that shape how people communicate. Participants may come from different educational backgrounds, have additional needs that affect communication, or feel inhibited by conventional modes of expression. The language of evaluation itself e.g. surveys, forms, written feedback, can become a barrier if it is not carefully considered.

What Creative Ireland Shared Island Projects Did

Projects prioritised inclusivity by adapting communication methods to bridge cultural, regional, and accessibility gaps. For participants with specific needs, non-verbal tools like emoji-based feedback and physical “wellness continuum” check-ins ensured that emotional expression remained accessible to everyone, regardless of their verbal or written abilities.

Projects also used collaborative creative activities that fostered deep empathy through shared experience. Projects such as Isle of Song and Farm Walks shifted the focus from formal discussion to “shoulder-to-shoulder” interaction, using songwriting, walking, and shared meals to build organic connections.

Practical guidance for future project teams

- Consider language and communication as a planning priority from the outset, not an afterthought. Ask how your participants prefer to communicate and design your methods accordingly,
- Avoid assuming that written or verbal communication will work for all participants. Build in non-verbal, visual, and creative alternatives. Emoji-based tools, physical check-ins, drawing, and storytelling can all be effective modes of expression,
- Be attentive to the language you use to describe your project and its activities. Terms that feel neutral to project teams may carry unintended connotations for participants. Test your language with your target groups early,
- Use icebreakers and creative prompts that acknowledge and celebrate cultural and regional differences rather than smoothing them over. Playful engagement with accent, dialect, and local idiom can dissolve tension and build rapport,
- Train facilitators in inclusive communication practices, including trauma-informed approaches for participants who may find certain topics or modes of expression distressing, and
- Where participants have additional needs, plan for dedicated support such as an additional staff member, an advocate, or adapted materials.



Planning for Engagement

Engaging diverse and “seldom heard” participants requires deliberate, sustained, and flexible strategies. Recruitment is often more difficult and more resource-intensive than anticipated. Retaining participants over the life of a project presents its own challenges, particularly in cases where people face an element of instability or unpredictability in their life circumstances.

What Creative Ireland Shared Island Projects Did

Projects prioritised the creation of inclusive, non-judgmental environments through a combination of participant-centred methodologies, flexible delivery, diverse creative practices, and the involvement of trusted advocates.

Flexibility and responsiveness were important, with projects adjusting workshop and residential plans in response to participants’ evolving needs and interests, incorporating more play-based or drama-based approaches where these proved more engaging, or adjusting activities to participants’ energy levels.

Diverse creative practices such as writing, music, dance, movement, visual arts, parade-making, storytelling, and performance allowed participants to engage in ways that resonated with their interests and abilities. This breadth of creative opportunity was particularly effective in drawing in participants who might not have responded to a single art form.

The role of trusted advocates and key workers helped bridge communication gaps and ensured that people felt safe and understood throughout the process.

Practical guidance for future project teams

- Begin engagement planning early and invest adequate time and resources in recruitment of participants. Do not underestimate the effort required to reach, successfully recruit and retain participants from diverse and marginalised backgrounds,
- Design your programme around your prospective participants and their likely

participation patterns and availability e.g. consider different school terms, north and south. Consult with community organisations, youth services, and potential participants before finalising your approach,

- Build flexibility into your programme. Be prepared to adapt activities, schedules, and methods in response to what your participants need, not what your project plan assumed,
- Offer multiple creative entry points to the project and/or to activities. Not everyone will respond to the same art form or mode of expression. Variety increases the likelihood of meaningful engagement,
- Aim to include existing trusted advocates or key workers in project planning where possible, particularly for participants with additional needs or from marginalised backgrounds. A consistent, supportive presence can make the difference between participation and withdrawal,
- Plan for attrition. Build in contingency for groups or individuals who may drop out, and have strategies for maintaining momentum when this happens, such as onboarding new participants or facilitators (if appropriate), or adjusting activities to suit a smaller cohort of participants, and
- Where possible, use residential event formats. Projects consistently reported that multi-day, immersive experiences were among the most effective strategies for building trust, dissolving social barriers, and fostering lasting connections.

Preparing Budgets and Administration

All-island creative projects operate with a level of logistical and administrative complexity that is routinely underestimated in initial budgets and project plans. The costs of travel, accommodation, artist fees, venue hire, materials, insurance, evaluation, and dedicated project management accumulate rapidly — and the hidden costs of coordination across two jurisdictions, differing organisational systems,

and the costs of lengthy recruitment periods can place severe strain on project teams and budgets.

What Creative Ireland Shared Island Projects Did

Individual projects were awarded grants ranging from fifty thousand euro to a quarter of a million euro. The administrative and logistical demands required by this level of funding sometimes exceeded expectations. Practical challenges such as differing digital office systems between partner organisations created practical problems for document sharing and general administration. High costs for specific activities like field trips occasionally limited the ability of staff to engage participants fully. Funding constraints also forced some teams to reduce online engagement or shorten exchange trips to stay within their allocated budgets.

The need for dedicated project management and support staff emerged as a clear requirement. Project teams recommended hiring external support to handle logistics so that creative and youth work staff could focus entirely on engagement. Relying on core creative teams for administrative tasks risked burnout and diverted energy from the primary goals of the projects. Coordinators often found themselves managing unplanned tasks like evaluation surveys which added to already heavy workloads.

Strong project management requires realistic resourcing, and future projects must budget accordingly to ensure success. Additionally, providing fair compensation for creative practitioners remained a priority to maintain the quality and professionalism of the engagement.

Practical guidance for future project teams

- Budget realistically for administration and logistics from the outset. Cross-border projects consistently cost more to coordinate than anticipated. Build in contingency for unexpected costs,

- Allocate dedicated budget for project management and administrative support. Do not assume that creative or youth work staff can absorb these responsibilities,
- Account for the costs of all-island coordination such as travel between jurisdictions, differing organisational systems, currency exchange, and the time required to navigate two sets of institutional processes,
- Budget for evaluation as a distinct line item. Robust evaluation requires resources for design, data collection, analysis, and reporting,
- Ensure adequate compensation for artists and creative practitioners. Fair payment supports professional engagement, signals respect and contributes directly to project quality,
- Where budgets are tight, be explicit about the trade-offs. Shorter trips or fewer longer trips, reduced online engagement, or scaled-back evaluation all have consequences for project outcomes, and
- Advocate for funding models that recognise the operational complexity of all-island work. Standard project budgets designed for single-jurisdiction delivery are unlikely to be sufficient.

Planning for Legislative Compliance

All-island creative projects operate across two distinct legal and regulatory jurisdictions. Differences in child safeguarding legislation, insurance requirements, health and safety regulations, data protection, governance structures, and organisational policies create a layer of administrative complexity that must be navigated carefully and consistently. The consequences of non-compliance are serious, and the administrative burden of achieving compliance across both jurisdictions is substantial.

What Creative Ireland Shared Island Projects Did

Delivering projects across Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland presented challenges because of differing legislation, organisational policies, governance requirements, currencies, and cultural contexts.

Child safeguarding and trauma-informed practice were prioritised and this ensured that that participation was equitable, safe, and responsive to each person's needs.

Health and safety planning required flexibility. *Future Parade* faced a significant test when its final parade in Belfast was cancelled due to adverse weather, a decision that prioritised participant safety over planned outcomes.

Practical guidance for future project teams

- Map relevant legislative and regulatory requirements of both jurisdictions at the earliest stage of project planning. Identify where requirements differ and develop clear protocols for meeting both sets of obligations,
- Invest in safeguarding training for all staff and creative practitioners, ensuring it is relevant to both jurisdictions. Vetting, consent, and safeguarding procedures

should be embedded in daily practice, not treated as a one-off compliance exercise,

- Adopt trauma-informed approaches as standard, particularly when working with young people or vulnerable adults. This means being prepared to adapt plans when participants' wellbeing requires it,
- Develop standardised consent processes that satisfy the requirements of both jurisdictions while minimising the administrative burden on participants and their families. Multiple, overlapping consent forms can be confusing and off-putting,
- Build contingency into health and safety planning. Outdoor events, residential stays, and all-island travel all carry risks that may require plans to change at short notice.
- Consider designating a team member with specific expertise in all-island governance and legislation. This role can ensure compliance and reduce the burden on creative and programme staff, and
- Maintain clear, transparent communication with participants and partners about safeguarding procedures, data use, and the reasons behind administrative requirements.



Planning for Travel

Moving participants across the island for residential, workshops, performances, and exchange visits is one of the most logistically demanding aspects. Travel planning must account for distance, cost, accessibility, safeguarding during transit, accommodation, and the differing infrastructures and regulatory requirements of two jurisdictions. For participants with limited mobility, childcare responsibilities, or unstable living situations, travel can be a significant barrier to participation.

What Creative Ireland Shared Island Projects Did

Residential formats were widely used and consistently reported as effective strategies for building relationships, fostering trust, and enabling the depth of engagement that cross-border work requires.

However, residential formats placed significant demands on project teams. *Living Legends* coordinators described the workload as “very labour-intensive” and recommended dedicated project support staff for future iterations to manage travel, accommodation, and scheduling. The administrative effort includes coordinating all-island residential such as booking transport, arranging accommodation, managing dietary and medical needs, ensuring safeguarding during overnight stays, and navigating insurance requirements.

The *Shared Lived Experience Through Creative Arts* project dedicated the initial residential to agreeing the ‘contract’ between organisers and participants, recognising that the format and environment could be difficult or triggering for some.

Accessibility is a critical consideration and be prepared to involve additional staff to support participants with mobility needs, enabling full participation in rehearsals, residential, and performances.

Practical guidance for future project teams

- Plan travel logistics early and in detail. All-island travel involves coordination across transport providers, accommodation, dietary and medical needs, safeguarding protocols, and insurance,
- Budget generously for travel and accommodation. These costs are frequently underestimated and can become a limiting factor on project design and participation,
- Use residential formats where possible and practical for participants. The evidence from the programme suggests that multi-day, immersive experiences are among the most powerful tools for building trust, dissolving barriers, and enabling meaningful cross-border engagement,
- Assess accessibility needs at the point of recruitment, not after plans are finalised. Ensure that venues, transport, and accommodation are accessible to all participants, and allocate budget for additional support where needed,
- Distribute travel across the island. Holding sessions in different locations reduces the burden on any single group,
- Allow adequate time for travel and rest within programme schedules. Participants arriving tired or rushed are less likely to engage fully. Build in time for informal social interaction, which is often where the most significant relationship-building happens, and
- Develop contingency plans for participants who may need to leave the residential location unexpectedly, e.g. for dealing with family matters or medical emergencies etc.

Partnership Creation and Development

All-island creative partnerships bring together organisations that may share a creative vision but operate in different institutional, cultural, and regulatory environments. Differences in organisational structure, administrative systems, resource capacity, and local context can create

friction even where strategic objectives are closely aligned. Building partnerships that are robust enough to withstand the pressures of all-island delivery — and flexible enough to adapt when circumstances change — requires deliberate investment of time, attention, and goodwill.

What Creative Ireland Shared Island Projects Did

Often, strong partnerships were built upon pre-existing relationships and shared artistic values, for example, through working together in the past, or informal connections amongst personnel. *Creative Connections* successfully united organisations like Fighting Words and Graffiti Theatre Company because they already possessed a history of collaboration on playwriting projects. Similarly *Living Legends* leveraged the storytelling expertise of Narrative 4 alongside the Northern Ireland Youth Forum to cultivate empathy. *Building Shared Creative Communities* aimed to consolidate the bond between Waterford and Antrim by focusing on their common interests in industrial heritage and public art.

While these strategic alignments ensured a shared vision from the start, they did not always eliminate operational frictions. Sustained investment in relationship-building activities was essential for both participants and facilitators. This was seen through residential exchanges in neutral locations, informal social interaction and reciprocal visits to deepen mutual understanding of each partner's unique operating context, local area, and cultural heritage.

Practical guidance for future project teams

- Build partnerships on shared values and, where possible, on pre-existing relationships. Partnerships that begin with a foundation of trust and mutual respect are better equipped to navigate the inevitable challenges of cross-border delivery,
- Invest time in relationship-building before and during the project. Do not assume that shared objectives will translate automatically

into smooth collaboration. Facilitators, coordinators, and partners all need time to develop working relationships,

- Acknowledge and plan for operational differences. Differing digital systems, administrative processes, resource capacities, and organisational cultures are predictable features of all-island partnerships. Identify these differences early and agree on practical solutions,
- Ensure local presence in both jurisdictions. A coordinator or partner organisation with established networks and referral pathways on each side of the border is essential for balanced recruitment and effective delivery,
- Organise reciprocal visits between partner organisations and their teams, not only for project participants. Direct exposure to each partner's context, heritage, and working environment deepens understanding and strengthens the partnership,
- Be explicit about roles, responsibilities, and resource expectations from the outset. Where partners have different capacities, acknowledge this openly and plan accordingly rather than allowing resentment or imbalance to develop over the course of the project,
- Build in time for joint reflection. Regular partner meetings monitor progress but also share learning, surface difficulties, and celebrate achievements, and
- Recognise that partnership development is itself an outcome of the work. The relationships built between organisations during a all-island project have lasting value and can form the foundation for future collaboration, provided they are nurtured with the same care as the relationships between participants.

Planning for Evaluation and Impact Measurement

The Creative Ireland Shared Island initiative demonstrated that effective evaluation of creative, cross-community work demands both

rigour and imagination. There is no single template or framework that fits every context. The most successful projects were those that combined structured, formal methods with adaptive, creative, and participant-centred approaches and that treated evaluation as an integral part of project learning.

Future funded projects can draw on this collective experience to design evaluation strategies that are robust enough to satisfy funders, flexible enough to respect participants, and rich enough to capture the transformative potential of creative work across communities.

This chapter distils what was learned about evaluation across the programme and from individual project evaluations. It sets out the principal approaches used, highlights what worked well, identifies common challenges, and offers practical guidance for projects navigating this terrain in the future.

Mixed-Methods and Participant-Centred Evaluation

The programme highlighted the value of **mixed-methods evaluation**, combining quantitative data (attendance records, survey results, pre- and post-measures) with qualitative data (observations, interviews, focus groups, creative

reflections, and participant feedback). This combination allows projects to demonstrate reach and scale through numbers while capturing the nuanced, human dimensions of change through narrative and testimony.

Project involving young people drew on the **Creative Ireland evaluation guidelines for Creative Youth Projects** as a framework for structuring this approach. Others developed bespoke frameworks, but the underlying principle was consistent: evaluation should be designed around the people it seeks to understand, not imposed upon them.

Practical guidance for future project teams

- Align your evaluation approach with an established framework where one exists (such as the Creative Ireland guidelines) and define meaningful, measurable outcomes,
- Plan for mixed-methods evaluation from the outset and be prepared to adapt and respond to stakeholder needs as they emerge. Identify which questions are best answered with quantitative data (How many? How much change?) and which require qualitative evidence (What changed? How did it feel? What did it mean?), and



- Let the characteristics and needs of your participants shape your evaluation methods, not the other way around. If your participants are unlikely to complete a written survey, do not rely on written surveys.

Formal and Structured Evaluation Methods

External and Academic Evaluators

Funded projects often contracted independent, external evaluators and this brought rigour, credibility, and an outside perspective that busy project teams could not easily provide themselves. The *Art of Life* project, for example, partnered with the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland to conduct a social return on investment evaluation. The *Living Legends* project found its external evaluator invaluable for capturing insights during residential activities that youth workers, focused on facilitation, would otherwise have missed.

Practical guidance for future project teams

- Consider commissioning an external evaluator at the project commencement or design stage, not as an afterthought. Early involvement allows the evaluator to help shape data collection from the beginning,
- External evaluation is especially valuable where projects want to demonstrate impact or where the complexity of the work makes self-assessment insufficient, and
- Be realistic about costs because external evaluation requires budget, and projects should advocate for adequate evaluation funding in their proposals.

Pre- and Post-Surveys

Pre- and post-surveys remain a key method for establishing a baseline and tracking change over time. The *Creative Boardroom: Collaborate4Climate* project used pre/post-test surveys to measure participants' understanding of climate change at the start and end of workshops. The *Creative Cafés* and *Shared Histories: Diverse Views* projects used similar approaches to track attitudinal shifts.

Surveys were frequently adapted to suit specific participant groups. Anonymous surveys were used for young people, and digital tools such as SurveyMonkey, MentiMeter, and Google Forms enabled efficient collection and analysis.

Practical guidance for future project teams

- Keep surveys short, clear, and relevant to your activities and participants. Evaluation fatigue is a real risk, particularly with participants who attend multiple sessions,
- Use pre- and post-measures where you want to demonstrate change over time but be aware of their limitations as they capture self-reported shifts and do not always reflect the full picture, and
- Adapt the format to your audience. Anonymous digital surveys may work well for young people but visual or verbal alternatives may be needed for other groups.

Logic Models and Theories of Change

Some projects developed structured frameworks to guide their evaluation from the outset. The *Divergently Together* team created a logic model identifying what they wanted to happen, what would tell them it was happening, and how they would gather that information. The *Art of Life* project used a Theory of Change (a description of how and why a change is expected to happen) to map the relationships between activities, intermediate outcomes (such as increased engagement or skill development), and longer-term outcomes.

Practical guidance for future project teams

- Develop a logic model or Theory of Change early in the project. This does not need to be complex. It simply needs to articulate the pathway from activities to intended outcomes and identify what evidence you will collect at each stage, and
- Revisit and refine your logic model or Theory of Change as the project progresses. Initial assumptions underpinning your logic model or Theory of Change early may end up being

inaccurate and a good framework should evolve with the work.

Adaptive and Qualitative Methods

Formal methods are important but can have limitations when working with vulnerable, diverse or hard-to-reach populations. Creative Ireland Shared Island projects used a range of adaptive and human-centred approaches to capture impact that traditional tools would miss.

Observation and Anecdotal Evidence

For participants living with dementia, those with intellectual impairments, or individuals who are shy or withdrawn, direct observation was of the most valuable evaluation tools. The *Sharing Songs and Unforgettable Voices* project relied on observing mood, facial expressions, and body language, supplemented by feedback from carers.

In the *Creative Cafés* project, occupational therapists reported that patients described the sessions as “the highlight of their week”, a simple but powerful indicator of wellbeing. The *Dear Future Me* team witnessed participants who had previously been formal and polite with each other running up and embracing each other at a public event, a visible sign of deepened connection.

The *Living Legends* project adopted an “accompaniment” method, in which the researcher embedded themselves within the group to gather organic feedback while minimising the observer effect.

Practical guidance for future project teams

- Train facilitators and staff to observe and record meaningful moments during sessions, changes in body language, spontaneous interactions, shifts in energy or confidence,
- Feedback from carers, support workers, and other professionals who know your participants can be a rich and reliable source of evidence, and
- Document observations systematically. Anecdotal evidence is often useful, but it carries more weight when it is recorded consistently and can be analysed alongside other data.

Creative and Reflective Tools

It is evidence that projects used creative outputs as both documentation and evidence of impact. This means that projects used the creative process itself as a means of reflection and measurement.



The *Living Legends* project compiled an anthology of the creative writing, improvisation, and stories produced by young people. This is a unique record of artistic achievement and personal development.

- The *Dear Future Me* project used a “letter to future self” method, in which participants wrote a letter that was posted back to them after 100 days, prompting personal reflection on their journey,
- The *Farm Walks* project used visual mapping, drawing, and group storytelling to enable participants to express insights beyond words and numbers,
- The *Isle of Song* project provided participants with customised notebooks for their lyrics. This worked as a memento and a tangible record of creative work,
- Other projects used **creative reflection journals**, drawing exercises, or “roadmap” activities to elicit insights from participants who might not engage with conventional evaluation tools, and
- **Emoji placing and signalling** methods were developed for participants with additional needs, offering a non-verbal way to express feelings and reactions.

Practical guidance for future project teams

- Consider how the creative outputs of your project can double as evaluation evidence. Poems, songs, artworks, and stories can tell you a great deal about what participants experienced and how they changed,
- Design creative evaluation activities that feel like a natural part of the project and not an add-on. Participants are more likely to engage meaningfully when reflection is woven into the creative process, and
- These methods are particularly valuable for participants that find traditional evaluation methods inaccessible, but they can be used for any group.

Focus Groups and Facilitated Discussions

Group discussions were widely used to gather qualitative feedback from participants. The *Laces of Ireland* project used focus groups to explore changes in perception, confidence, and social connections. In the *Divergently Together* project, reflective sessions at the end of each engagement allowed participants’ thoughts to emerge organically. Walking debates and other participatory formats were used to engage young people.



Practical guidance for future project teams

- Build reflective discussions into your programme schedule,
- Use skilled facilitation to create a safe space where participants feel comfortable sharing honest feedback. This can include critical perspectives, and
- For young people, consider formats that involve movement or activity (such as walking debates or voting exercises) rather than seated discussion.

Video and Multimedia Documentation

Several projects used video to capture both the process and impact of their work. The *Art of Life* project collated video testimonies of participants speaking about the project's impact. The *Sharing Songs and Unforgettable Voices* choir employed a videographer to capture rehearsals, interviews, and performances, documenting moments of creativity and connection. For larger events, voting polls were used successfully to gauge audience response.

Practical guidance for future project teams

- Video and multimedia documentation serve a dual purpose in providing evaluation evidence as well as material for communication, advocacy, and future funding, and
- Ensure informed consent is obtained for all recording and be sensitive to the fact that some participants may not wish to be filmed.

Internal Reflection and Continuous Learning

Evaluation is not only an external accountability exercise. Across the programme, project teams used evaluation as an internal tool for learning, adaptation, and improvement.

- The *Creative Connections – Shared Writing Across the Island* project operated a three-tiered evaluation system. This included immediate workshop wrap-ups with facilitators, formal programme evaluations, and a quarterly “community of practice”

among staff for in-depth reflection and impact assessment,

- Many projects held **regular meetings with delivery partners** to monitor progress, share feedback, and make real-time adjustments. The Farm Walks project reviewed reflection pieces after each walk, and
- The *Creative Boardroom: Collaborate4Climate* project emphasised continuous feedback and iterative improvement through post-workshop retrospectives and real-time adjustments.

Practical guidance for future project teams

- Build regular internal reflection into your project and debrief after each session or phase, not just at the end,
- Create structures, such as communities of practice or partner review meetings, that make reflection a project routine, and
- Use what you learn because evaluation is only valuable if it feeds back into practice. Be prepared to adapt your approach based on what the evidence tells you.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical practice was a consistent theme across the programme. Projects ensured informed consent, provided assurances of anonymity, and gave participants the option to opt out of evaluation activities at any point. A trauma-informed and culturally sensitive approach was highlighted as essential, particularly when working with vulnerable populations or across community divides.

The Living Legends project's alignment with the **Lundy Model of Participation** is an example structuring evaluation so that young people had genuine voice and influence, not merely token involvement. The Birds of a Feather project was guided by **participatory and feminist research principles**, centring the lived experiences of participants.

Practical guidance for future project teams

- Make ethical review a standard part of your

evaluation planning by ensuring consent processes are clear, accessible, and genuinely voluntary,

- Be particularly attentive to power dynamics because participants may feel obliged to give positive feedback if they depend on the project or its staff, and
- Consider whether your evaluation methods are themselves trauma-informed. Asking people to reflect on difficult experiences requires care, preparation, and appropriate support.

Data Analysis

For qualitative data, **thematic analysis** was the most frequently used method across the programme, allowing evaluators to identify patterns, themes, and narratives within participant feedback, interviews, and creative outputs. Quantitative data was typically collated and summarised using tools such as Microsoft Excel.

Practical guidance for future project teams

- Plan your analysis approach before you begin collecting data. You should know what you will do with the information you gather,
- Thematic analysis is accessible and well suited to creative projects, but it benefits from clear documentation of the process, how themes were identified, what was included or excluded, and why, and
- Even basic quantitative analysis (attendance trends, survey averages, pre/post comparisons) can be powerful when combined with qualitative narrative.

Expanding Impact Narratives

While the evaluation approaches described above generated rich qualitative data and compelling indications of impact, the interim evaluation identified a need for more detailed and robust methods to fully capture project outcomes and assess value for money.

Measuring value for money requires evidence of the **amount of change** produced, the **value of that change** to those affected, the **duration** of any change, the degree of **attribution** (whether other factors contributed), and the level of **deadweight** (how much change would have occurred without the project). Evaluations should also explore the potential for both negative and positive outcomes.

One framework that addresses these components is **Social Return on Investment (SROI)**, which measures the value created by an intervention by capturing social, environmental, and economic outcomes and translating them into a common monetary unit. SROI produces a ratio, for example €3 of social value generated for every €1 invested, that helps organisations understand their impact and communicate it to stakeholders.

A full SROI analysis is resource-intensive and may not be appropriate or possible for every project. However, as a principle-based approach, elements of its methodology can be applied selectively. Central to SROI is the principle that **stakeholders are involved in identifying outcomes that affect them**. These outcomes are typically expressed in a Theory of Change showing the relationships between intermediate outcomes (such as feeling engaged, motivated, or developing skills) and well-defined outcomes.

Practical guidance for future project teams

- Even if a full SROI is out of scope for your projects, you can familiarise yourself with its principles e.g. involving stakeholders in defining outcomes, understanding attribution and deadweight, and considering the duration and value of change will strengthen any evaluation,
- Develop well-defined outcome indicators at the outset, not just what you hope will happen, but how you will know it has happened and how you will measure its significance, and
- Consider seeking additional guidance or training on SROI principles to better articulate the value your project creates.

Table 13: Common Impact Areas Identified by Projects and Indicators

Potential 'Well-defined' Outcomes	Indicators	Data Source that identified these outcomes	Qualitative Evidence from Interviews
Improved Mental Wellbeing	Reduction in reported stress/ anxiety levels, increase in reported wellbeing levels	Pre- and post-project surveys, interviews with participants and carers	Many projects reported positive impacts on participants' mental health and wellbeing (e.g., <i>Sharing Songs Unforgettable Voices</i> , <i>Creative Cafés</i> , <i>Dear Future Me</i> , <i>Farm Walks</i> , <i>Divergently Together</i>).
Reduced Social Isolation	Increase in social interaction, formation of new friendships, increased participation in community activities	Participant surveys, interviews, observational data, attendance records	Several projects highlighted the creation of new social connections and reduced isolation (e.g., <i>Sharing Songs Unforgettable Voices</i> , <i>Creative Cafés</i> , <i>Dear Future Me</i> , <i>Farm Walks</i> , <i>The Ties That Bind</i> , <i>Shared Histories</i>).
Increased Confidence and Self-Esteem	Improved self-perception scores, increased self-advocacy	Participant surveys, interviews, observational data	Projects reported increased confidence among participants, particularly young people and emerging artists (<i>The Ties That Bind</i> , <i>To The Power of Three</i> , <i>Shared Histories: Diverse Views</i> , <i>Dance Connects</i> , <i>Divergently Together</i>).
Enhanced Social Skills	Improved communication skills, increased ability to collaborate, increased teamwork skills	Participant surveys, interviews, observational data	<i>Circus Explored</i> specifically highlighted the development of social skills through circus activities.
Skill Development	Acquisition of new skills (e.g., craft skills, digital skills, artistic skills), increased employability	Participant surveys, interviews, observational data, project outputs	Many projects resulted in participants gaining new skills (e.g., <i>Birds of a Feather</i> , <i>Shared Histories: Diverse Views</i> , <i>Weaving Worlds Together</i> , <i>To The Power of Three</i>).
Community Capacity Building	Establishment of new community networks or initiatives, increased community participation in projects	Project reports, documentation of community activities, interviews with community leaders	Several projects led to the creation of new community networks or initiatives (<i>Shifting Tides</i> , <i>Creative Cafés</i> , <i>The Ties That Bind</i>).
Improved All-island Understanding	Increased willingness to engage with people from different backgrounds, increased positive perceptions of communities across the border, formation of all-island friendships	Participant surveys, interviews, observational data	Many projects reported positive impacts on all-island relationships and understanding (e.g., <i>The Ties That Bind</i> , <i>Shared Histories: Diverse Views</i> , <i>Dear Future Me</i> , <i>Dance Connects</i> , <i>Farm Walks</i>).
Climate Action Behavioural Change	Adoption of sustainable practices, increased participation in environmental initiatives, development of climate action plans	Project reports, documentation of environmental activities, interviews with stakeholders	Projects addressing climate action (<i>Divergently Together</i> , <i>Shifting Tides</i> , <i>Creative Boardroom: Collaborate4Climate</i>) reported increased awareness and engagement with climate issues, although measuring behavioural change proved more challenging.

Common Challenges and Lessons Learned

The Creative Ireland Shared Island collective experience highlighted several recurring challenges and practical lessons that future projects should anticipate.

Evaluation fatigue

Participants and project teams can become weary of evaluation processes, particularly when these feel repetitive or disconnected from the creative work. Projects that embedded evaluation within creative activities, rather than adding it on as a separate exercise, were more successful in sustaining engagement.

Logistical and administrative burden

The practical demands of evaluation such as designing instruments, collecting data, managing consent, analysing findings can be considerable. Projects should budget for this realistically and, where possible, allocate dedicated staff time or commission external support.

Adapting methods for diverse participants

Standard evaluation tools are not suitable for all participants. Projects working with people living with dementia, individuals with low literacy or intellectual impairments, young people, or those from marginalised communities must design methods that are accessible, respectful, and appropriate.

Recruitment and consent

Recruiting participants for evaluation activities (as distinct from the project itself) can be difficult, and navigating multiple consent requirements adds complexity.

Clearly defined outcomes

Projects that established clear outcome indicators at the outset found evaluation more straightforward and more persuasive. Those that did not sometimes struggled to demonstrate impact convincingly.

Consistent data collection

Tracking engagement, attendance, and communication metrics consistently throughout a project provides a fuller picture and avoids reliance on end-of-project recall.

Trauma-informed practice

Facilitators and evaluators working in sensitive contexts benefit from trauma-informed training, ensuring that evaluation activities do not inadvertently cause harm.

Clear communication

Participants should understand the purpose of evaluation activities and how their contributions will be used. Transparency builds trust and improves the quality of data collected.

Summary of Recommendations for Future Projects

- 1. Design evaluation into the project from the start.** Do not treat it as an afterthought. Develop a logic model or Theory of Change early, identifying intended outcomes and the evidence you will collect.
- 2. Use mixed methods.** Combine quantitative measures with qualitative and creative approaches to capture the full picture of impact.
- 3. Ensure a participant-centred approach to evaluation.** Tailor evaluation methods to the needs, preferences, and capacities of the people you are working with.
- 4. Consider external evaluation.** Independent evaluators bring rigour, credibility, and a perspective that delivery teams cannot easily replicate.
- 5. Embed evaluation in practice.** Weave reflection and feedback into the rhythm of the project rather than adding it as an add-on.
- 6. Build internal reflection structures.** Regular debriefs, communities of practice, and partner review meetings support continuous learning and improvement.

- 7. Budget realistically.** Evaluation costs time and money. Advocate for adequate evaluation budgets in funding applications.
- 8. Prioritise ethics.** Ensure informed consent, anonymity, and sensitivity throughout. Use trauma-informed approaches where appropriate.
- 9. Define outcomes clearly.** Well-defined outcomes, developed in consultation with stakeholders, make evaluation more focused and more credible.
- 10. Document consistently.** Systematic recording of observations, attendance, feedback, and creative outputs builds a robust evidence base over time.
- 11. Explore SROI principles.** Even without a full SROI analysis, applying its core principles of stakeholder involvement, attribution, deadweight, and outcome valuation will deepen your understanding of impact and strengthen your case to funders.
- 12. Share what you learn.** Evaluation findings are most valuable when they contribute to a broader evidence base. Share reports, methods, and lessons learned with funders, peers, and the wider sector.



9. Appendices



Pic: *Circus and Beyond* - Cruinniú na nÓg



Shared Interests

9. Appendices

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Appendix A – A Profile of the Creative Ireland Shared Island Projects Evaluated

Please note that in the final version of this report, the table below will be updated to reflect the project evaluation methods per project, once evaluation reports are complete.

Table 14: A Profile of the 22 Creative Ireland Shared Island Projects Evaluated

Project Title	Primary Thematic Pillar	Key Art Forms / Types of Creative Engagement	Modes of Participation	Target Groups
<i>Dance Connects in Rural Border Regions</i>	<i>Creative Communities</i>	Dance (contemporary, jive/country, line/social, Sean-Nós, hip hop/urban, Scottish Country and Flamenco)	Dance sharing, facilitated sessions, exhibition	Dance practitioners, diverse dance communities, professional, amateur, community and commercial
<i>Birds of a Feather</i>	<i>Creative Communities</i>	Craftwork (traditional and contemporary)	All-island visits, craft workshops, mosaic	Women from various backgrounds: Catholic, Protestant, nationalist, loyalist, ethnic minorities, Travellers, inner-city working class, islanders and people with physical disabilities or mild dementia
<i>Farm Walks</i>	<i>Creative Communities</i>	Storytelling, music, art	Themed walks, community gatherings,	Farmers and artists
<i>The Ties That Bind</i>	<i>Creative Communities</i>	Songwriting, music, illustration, visual art, poetry	Weekend residencies, mini festivals, mentoring sessions	Arts venues, artists, communities
<i>Building Shared Creative Communities</i>	<i>Creative Communities</i>	Mural art, literature, craft, heritage and wellbeing	Heritage tours, workshops, exhibitions, mural creation, sound events, creative exchanges	Communities, artists, crafters, social entrepreneurs
<i>Laces of Ireland</i>	<i>Creative Communities</i>	Lacemaking	Exchanges, joint calendar of coordinated events	Lacemaker groups and heritage institutions
<i>Shared Histories: Diverse Views</i>	<i>Creative Communities</i>	Photography	Workshops, archive visits, walking tour, training	Border dwellers
<i>Sharing Songs and Unforgettable Voices</i>	<i>Creative Communities</i>	Singing	In-person and online events	Dementia inclusive community-based choirs from North Dublin and Counties Antrim and Down, carers
<i>Circus Explored</i>	<i>Cruinniú na nÓg</i>	Circus	Exchanges, performances	Young people
<i>To the Power of Three</i>	<i>Creative Youth</i>	Performance	Exchanges, performances, mentorship	Young people in Derry, Dublin and Wexford
<i>Isle of Song</i>	<i>Creative Youth</i>	Songwriting	Residential music hot houses, workshops, performances	Young people with prioritised access for marginalised / seldom heard

Living Legends: A Cross-Border Cultural Exchange of Stories, Myth and Landscape	<i>Creative Youth</i>	Storytelling	Youth-worker facilitated sessions, artist-led workshops, masterclasses, weekend residential exchanges, performances, excursions	Marginalised young people in Limerick city and Belfast city
Future Parade	<i>Creative Youth</i>	Parade, sustainable design, placemaking, performance, story	Workshops, residential weekends, performances, finale event	Young people from diverse backgrounds
Shared Lived Experience Through Creative Arts	<i>Creative Youth</i>	Storytelling, Theatre of the Oppressed	Residentials, day sessions, productions	Young people from Greater Belfast and Dublin, who have multiple and complex needs
Creative Connections - Shared Writing Across the Island	<i>Creative Youth</i>	Creative writing: scriptwriting, poetry, prose, song writing	All-island meetings, workshops, face-to-face sharing events, online mid-project collaboration, island-wide festival	Youth / community groups in pairings, with targeted support for seldom-heard / at risk of disadvantage, and groups from segregated and divided communities
Creative Cafés	<i>Creative Health and Wellbeing</i>	Creative Cafe style sessions Workshops	Creative Cafe style sessions Workshops, networking and capacity building events.	Members of new communities / minority groups, older adults, people with disabilities, individuals experiencing mental health issues and individuals experiencing socio-economic disadvantage and rural isolation
Weaving Worlds Together	<i>Creative Health and Wellbeing</i>	Traditional Irish craft work – basket weaving, willow weaving, ceramics, textiles, woodworking, knitting and crocheting	Skill-exchange workshops	People engaging with social prescribing services
The Art of Life	<i>Creative Health and Wellbeing</i>	Creative workshops	Creative workshops, end-of-life workshops, conference / celebration	Older people (50+)m care professionals, creatives
'Dear Future Me' - Promoting Positive Mental Health Through Creative Expression On Our Shared Island	<i>Creative Health and Wellbeing</i>	Hiking, craftwork, art therapy and meditation, videography, performing arts	Workshops, physical/ social experiences, festival, community gatherings	Young people (10-18) from Louth and Newry, Mourne and Down, facing loneliness, isolation and poor mental health
Divergently Together	<i>Creative Climate Action and Sustainability</i>	Technology – Brain-Computer Interface, participatory action research	Co-creation and hackathon-style workshops, open public meetings / workshops, action research workshops, exhibition, webinar	Neurodivergent people, people with disabilities, general public

<p><i>Shifting Tides and Sea Change: Creative Coastal Conversations</i></p>	<p><i>Creative Climate Action and Sustainability</i></p>	<p>Collaborative creative arts (music, dance, visual, performance art), citizen science</p>	<p>Programme of participation, education and communication, collaborative performance series, community workshop events (coastal foraging walks, oral heritage recordings scientific diving with underwater photography), soundscape podcast and mini documentary web series</p>	<p>Coastal communities around Carlingford Lough, general public</p>
<p><i>Creative Boardroom: Collaborate4Climate.</i></p>	<p><i>Creative Climate Action and Sustainability</i></p>	<p>Design thinking methodologies</p>	<p>Collaborative workshops/hackathons, exhibition</p>	<p>Company Directors, NCAD students, general public</p>

Appendix B – Creative Ireland Shared Island Projects

Table 15: Creative Communities on a Shared Island Projects

Project Title	Short Description	Lead Organisation	Locations
<i>Dance Connects in Rural Border Regions</i>	This 24-month creative collaboration partners Culture and Creativity Teams in the local authorities of Cavan, Monaghan and Fermanagh-Omagh with practitioners of diverse dance communities in their border area, and researchers from Queens University Belfast and UCD. The project strategically builds on existing community relationships and works across professional, amateur, community and commercial dance in contemporary, jive/country, line/social, Sean-Nós, hip hop/urban, Scottish Country and Flamenco.	Cavan County Council	Cavan, Monaghan, Fermanagh, Omagh
<i>Birds of a Feather</i>	A project that brings together women from various backgrounds: Catholic, Protestant, nationalist, loyalist, ethnic minorities, Travellers, inner-city working class, islanders and people with physical disabilities or mild dementia through the shared activity of craftwork – traditional and contemporary.	Clare County Council	Ennis, Ballinasloe, Inisbofin, Belfast
<i>Farm Walks</i>	Farm Walks brings together a cross-border network of farmers with shared interests and values from different rural communities in Leitrim and Fermanagh to co-create a programme of activities that deepen common concerns using new and creative approaches.	Leitrim County Council	Leitrim, Fermanagh
<i>The Ties That Bind</i>	A partnership between The Duncairn in inner city Belfast and Levis in Ballydehob in rural County Cork working to establish a cross-border network that has enabled exchanges for creatives living in rural Cork and inner-city Belfast, allowing creatives to work collectively on new composition through a series of exchanges, culminating in weekend collaborative working sessions, and mini festivals where both communities come together showcasing new work, creativity, arts and community.	Cork County Council	Ballydehob, Belfast
<i>Building Shared Creative Communities</i>	Through this joint project, Waterford City and County Council and Mid and East Antrim Borough Council will work together to foster social interaction, engagement and dialogue with each of the local communities. Concentrating initially on the theme of People, Place and Connections through areas of commonality in mural art, literature, craft, heritage and wellbeing.	Waterford City and County Council	Waterford, Antrim
<i>Laces of Ireland</i>	The project focuses on supporting collaboration and exchanges between lacemaker groups and heritage institutions on the island of Ireland. The long term goal is to create and promote a lace trail through the majority of historical lacemaking centres on the island of Ireland. A joint calendar of coordinated events focused on August Craft Month in 2024 and 2025. A digital platform (Laces of Ireland), a trail map will be created.	Limerick City and County Council	Limerick, South Armagh, Cork
<i>Shared Histories: Diverse Views</i>	Shared Histories engaged communities on both sides of the border, bringing them together to explore their heritage and to share experiences, utilising photography's unique ability to unlock a shared past.	Donegal County Council	Derry, Donegal, Louth

Sharing Songs and Unforgettable Voices	Through a shared love of singing a sustainable cross-border, cross-community two-year creative arts and cultural project with dementia inclusive community-based choirs from North Dublin and Counties Antrim and Down. Collaboration has focused on building personal and community relationships between people with and without dementia, and their carers, with in person exchanges.	Fingal County Council	Fingal, Antrim, Down
Clare Mela	Mela is a Sanskrit word meaning “gathering” or “to meet”, and Clare Mela brings together a diverse group of performers, local community groups, and audiences for one day of street performance and spectacle, bringing celebration and joy for all the family. Led by Clare County Council with partners Fidget Feet and Shannon Tidy Towns as well as ArtsEkta, Clare and Belfast Mela are deeply committed to engaging with all communities and traditions, including those of newer communities on the island of Ireland. This project allows for the Mela Communities in Ireland to work together across the island both in the presentation of cultural and artistic performances but also by fostering creative opportunities for connection through social interaction, engagement and dialogue.	Clare County Council	Belfast, Shannon Co Clare
Contemporary Cities	Contemporary Cities 2025 brings together the communities of the Limerick School of Music (LSOM) and the Ulster Youth Orchestra (UYO) with the world-renowned contemporary music ensemble Hard Rain Soloist Ensemble (HRSE). The initiative is to facilitate and empower both the young people and teaching staff, within the Limerick and Belfast youth orchestral communities, to develop their creative expression and experience creativity in their own cities through the lens of their counterparts. Through participation in this programme of cultural activity there will be a drive in both their personal and collective creativity, thus contributing to their individual and societal wellbeing and achievement. The programme commenced with workshops in Limerick in 2024, followed by pop up chamber music and orchestral performances in The Titanic Experience in April 2025. Autumn 2025 will build on this through work with a contemporary music composer with connections north and south, leading to performances in Limerick City.	Limerick City and County Council	Limerick, Belfast
I Lár An Aonaigh	In response to growing public interest in Irish-language arts and cultural events, I Lár An Aonaigh aims to empower the next generation of cultural producers and project managers working trí Ghaeilge. Developed in partnership with the Scene + Heard Festival, this cross-border initiative brings together twelve emerging cultural producers from North and South of the island. Through a combination of practical workshops, expert-led lectures, and structured networking events in Dublin and Belfast, participants gain the skills, confidence, and industry insight needed to programme and manage cultural events of any scale through the Irish language. I Lár An Aonaigh addresses the urgent need to expand the community of creative producers working through Irish, while also fostering shared resources and professional networks across the island.	Dublin City Council	Dublin, Belfast

<p>Columbanus Connections: A Creative Weekend of Shared Pilgrimage and Heritage</p>	<p>Led by Carlow County Council with Friends of Columbanus Bangor, Carlow hosted the XXVI Columbanus Day celebration from July 11th to 13th, 2025. This significant occasion honoured St. Columbanus, one of Ireland’s most influential early missionaries, recognised for his contributions to the spiritual and cultural foundation of Europe. Columbanus was born in Carlow, in the shadow of the Blackstairs Mountains.</p>	<p>Carlow County Council</p>	<p>Wexford, Carlow, Kildare, Meath and Cavan to Cleenish Island in Co Fermanagh, Monaghan, Armagh and Strangford Lough, Nendrum and Bangor, Co Down</p>
<p>Stories of a Shared Island - A Community Media Project</p>	<p>Stories of a Shared Island is a cross-border initiative uniting community media organisations from north and south to creatively explore identity, culture, and shared histories through their unique moving image archives. Featuring partners from Cork, Dublin, and Belfast, the project curates decades of community-led footage—much of it previously unseen—to spark dialogue and connection across the island. Through workshops, exchange visits, and public screenings, it fosters collaboration between media practitioners, cultural organisations, and local communities, while laying the groundwork for a future All-Island Community TV Service that celebrates diverse voices and local narratives.</p>	<p>Cork City Council</p>	<p>Cork, Dublin, Belfast</p>
<p>Fáilte go Gaillimh agus Feirste Thiar</p>	<p>This project brings Galway City and Fáilte Feirste Thiar together with community organisations to explore the untapped potential for the Irish language to be an integral part of the visitor experience. Galway City, as the only official Gaeltacht city in the state, and West Belfast as the largest urban Gaeltacht on the island of Ireland, are in a unique position to explore the opportunities of presenting the Irish language to visitors. Both areas are reliant on the tourism industry as an economic driver and the Irish language, and the communities that support it, is a unique selling point for these two cities as tourist destinations.</p>	<p>Galway City Council</p>	<p>Galway, West Belfast</p>
	<p>Through a series of exchanges, workshops, and presentations, participants will generate new ideas and creative approaches to better present the language and ensure it is central to the visitor’s cultural experience. Out of this collaboration, a final report of reflections and recommendations will be produced; a roadmap for Irish language tourism development – is ar scáth a chéile a mharóidh an pobal.</p>		

Hearth	<p>Hearth is an initiative that pairs professional artists with older people experiencing isolation, offering creative engagement that is both enriching and empowering. As part of the Shared Island Project, the Hearth Collective is partnering with artists and organisations in Fermanagh to explore how this successful Mayo-based model can be adapted in other rural contexts. Both regions share challenges of low population density and an ageing demographic, where isolation can impact health and wellbeing. Hearth brings art directly into people's homes, creating safe, stimulating spaces for older individuals to explore their creativity. This is not simply a service—it's a reciprocal exchange where artists deepen their professional practice through meaningful connection and collaboration. The project celebrates older people's voices and experiences, fostering dignity, joy, and artistic expression. By building creative bridges across borders, Hearth Shared Island promotes inclusion, wellbeing, and the transformative power of art in later life.</p>	<p>Mayo County Council</p>	<p>Mayo, Roscommon, Fermanagh</p>
Shared Air: Circus Connects	<p>In July 2025, Cairde Sligo Arts Festival and Festival of Fools partnered together on a vibrant North-South programme of circus, street theatre performances, workshops, talks and industry events; uniting exceptional artists from across the island of Ireland in a dynamic celebration of circus, street theatre, and outdoor arts. This initiative is rooted in the spirit of cross-cultural exchange, fostering meaningful connections between artists and communities from both the North and South through performance and cross-community workshops. At its core, this programme is a joyful exploration of shared heritage, diversity, and creative expression, using the universal language of performance to transcend borders.</p>	<p>Sligo County Council</p>	<p>Sligo, Belfast</p>
Play	<p>NOISE Music's project 'Play' is in collaboration with Belfast-based artist Viva Dean, and Michael Speers a drummer, sound artist and researcher from County Down. This Shared Island partnership is designed to enable the exchange of expertise and resources across regions. By integrating DJing, sequencing, and sampling with live electronic music improvisation and deliver innovative live electronic music performance workshops, the core objective is to increase the interactivity of NOISE workshops, enhance the quality of performance outputs, and strengthen the creative and technical skills of young people working in digital audio media. Through this work the NOISE Music team will co-develop a transferable workshop model for wider programme use. Outputs include collaborative music compositions, taster workshops for young participants, and a live or streamed electronic performance event. These activities will also serve to evaluate the methodology and inform future programme development. A series of workshops and studio sessions with the NOISE Team which will take place in Dublin and Belfast from October 2025.</p>	<p>South Dublin County Council</p>	<p>Dublin, Down</p>
Old Head Young Shoulders	<p>A collaborative creative project to develop a piece of contemporary theatre based on the issues facing young people in the communities of Coleraine and North-Kildare. It will be presented in Maynooth University on October 30th.</p> <p>Through devising and movement workshops, the young people explore what they hold in common and what is different between their communities. Over 6 days in the Halloween break (25-30th October) 15 young people (aged 13-16) from each group will visit each other's respective community, taking it in turns to host, and immerse themselves in workshops considering social, political and historical themes pertinent to them. This project aims to empower these young people to tell their stories, placing them in a wider societal and historical context and presenting the voice of a new Ireland, 27 years after the Good Friday Agreement (1998), before these young people were born. Led by Hannah Reilly (Ever Unique, Coleraine) and Geraldine O'Brien (Straffan Drama Club).</p>	<p>Kildare County Council</p>	<p>Kildare, Coleraine</p>

Table 16: Cruinniú na nÓg - Strategic Partners

Project Title	Short Description	Lead Organisation	Locations
Circus Explored	<p>Circus Explored introduces children and young people from across the Island of Ireland to the joy of circus through playful, hands-on participation. The project is a vibrant national initiative led by the Irish Street Arts, Circus and Spectacle Network (ISACS) in association with Creative Ireland and the Shared Island Initiative, and delivered in partnership with Galway Community Circus, Dublin Circus Project, Cloughjordan Circus Club, Circus Factory Cork, In Your Space Circus (Derry) and Circusful (Belfast). A core focus of the project is the strengthening of cross-border connections between young people through the Shared Island Exchanges. The exchanges foster collaboration between the circus schools, enabling young people to exchange ideas, develop skills, forge new friendships, build lasting connections and build stronger ties through the medium of circus. Circus Explored inspires creativity, builds confidence, grows collaboration and establishes lasting connections.</p>	Irish Street Arts, Circus and Spectacle Network	Galway, Dublin City, Tipperary, Cork City, Derry, Belfast, Meath, Donegal, Limerick City, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown, Kerry, Monaghan, Roscommon, Clare, Waterford, Kildare, Laois, Offaly, Monaghan, Kildare, Kilkenny, Wexford, Fingal
Youth Theatre Island	<p>Youth Theatre Island – a celebration of young voices Youth Theatre Island is a partnership initiative between Youth Theatre Ireland, Theatre and Dance NI and venues across the island to celebrate youth theatre and young people as artists.</p> <p>The ambitious 3-year programme will showcase plays written by, for, and with young people, premier new plays devised and written as part of the artistic development of the programme and will culminate in the first all-island National Youth Theatre programme in 2027.</p> <p>This artistically ambitious project marks a significant development in the relationship between Youth Theatre Ireland and Theatre and Dance NI, in supporting the social, personal and artistic development of young people across the island of Ireland.</p>	Youth Theatre Ireland, Theatre and Dance NI	Galway, Limerick, Derry, Belfast, Donegal, Kerry, Cork
RTÉ This is Art!	<p>RTÉ This Is Art! is a more than a competition, and a website. It's a creative collection, an encyclopaedic educational resource, an inclusive accessible community, an artist's showcase, and an editorial platform aimed at young people from across Ireland.</p> <p>The platform celebrates art and artists through featured stories, makers, techniques and tutorials with the hope of sparking inspiration among website visitors and helping to bridge the gap between the emerging and the established creatives.</p> <p>Over the past three years, This is Art! by RTÉ Kids, and the Creative Ireland Programme has established a unique creative arts platform filled with young artists' work and dozens of stories from creative practitioners from across the island of Ireland.</p> <p>The mission is to showcase young artists and highlight the messy and magical creative process behind each piece of work.</p>	RTÉ Children and Young People	Dublin, Limerick, Cork, Galway, Derry

<p>Rhyme Island</p>	<p>Rhyme Island, was an innovative, creative initiative, aimed to promote rap as a powerful tool for self-expression among young people across the island of Ireland. In 2023, through a national call-out, groups of marginalised young people participated in workshops, creating a collection of heartfelt songs reflecting the experiences of these young people. These songs found their spotlight not only online but also on various national platforms.</p>	<p>GMC Beats</p>	<p>Donegal, Dublin, Galway, Limerick, Clare</p>
	<p>Among the numerous highlights, the initiative facilitated collaborations across national and unionist communities in Northern Ireland and involved young aspirants from the Kabin Studio as junior tutors.</p>		
	<p>Feedback from both participants and youth workers/staff highlights the overwhelmingly positive outcomes of the workshops. Participants reported increased comfort in expressing themselves through rap and songwriting, along with the acquisition of new skills and knowledge. Youth workers praised the professionalism and effectiveness of the facilitators, noting that the workshops helped young people overcome reluctance and build confidence.</p>		

Table 17: Cruinniú na nÓg - Local Authority Led Partnerships

Project Title	Short Description	Lead Organisation	Locations
<p>Our Future – A Youth Centre Twinning Initiative</p>	<p>In 2024, Dublin City Council partnered with Prime Cut Productions in Belfast to launch a six-month youth exchange programme connecting young people from both cities as part of Cruinniú na nÓg. Over the course of several day trips and a residential stay, 16 participants collaborated to produce two short films, which were later screened at the Project Arts Centre in Dublin and the MAC in Belfast.</p> <p>Building on the success of this pilot, the programme expanded in 2025 through a new partnership involving Dublin City Council, Galway City Council, and Prime Cut Productions. Youth groups from Dublin, Galway, and Belfast took part in an extended exchange that included residential stays in Galway and Belfast, and a day trip to Dublin. Over four months, the participants co-created a new short film, which premiered as part of Cruinniú na nÓg celebrations in Galway City.</p>	<p>Dublin City Council</p>	<p>Dublin, Galway, Belfast</p>
<p>Songlines</p>	<p>Songlines is a cross-border music development and performance project connecting emerging singer-songwriters and bands from Leitrim and Derry. Through expert-led training, creative collaboration, and genre-based showcases, it equips artists with the skills and support to build sustainable careers. At its heart, Songlines celebrates the power of music to transcend borders and generations—uniting communities, amplifying new voices, and telling the story of a shared island through sound.</p>	<p>Leitrim County Council</p>	<p>Leitrim, Monaghan, Kilkenny</p>

Spoke 'n' Folk – part of The Ties That Bind project	<p>On Saturday, 7th June 2025, a unique Shared Island music project launched at Levis Corner House, Ballydehob and The Duncairn Arts Centre, Belfast joined forces for Spoke 'n' Folk, part of Creative Ireland's Cruinniú na nÓg and the Shared Island initiative. On the same day, young artists in West Cork and Belfast took part in workshops, mentorship sessions, and live performances, celebrating creativity in their own communities while laying the groundwork for future collaboration.</p> <p>In Belfast, TG4 Gradam Ceoil bursary winners and the Duncairn Trad Collective led traditional music workshops and a family concert, while in Ballydehob, young musicians, poets, and spoken word artists developed original work and shared it with audiences at Levis'. The two groups then connected virtually, exchanging music and ideas before meeting in person. The project will culminate in November when the group comes together to record the music they have created together.</p>	Cork County Council	Cork, Belfast
Climate and Health: A Cross-Border	<p>A collaboration between The MAC and local schools including St. Louise's Comprehensive and Hazelwood Integrated College. Through creative mind mapping, story development exercises, local knowledge and immersive technologies, these themes have informed a dynamic narrative. This narrative is rooted in the idea of 'Fake News', i.e. the fake news relating to Climate Change and Health that is pedaled to young people through social media channels.</p> <p>The development of critical thinking skills in Phase 2 empowered social-media oriented young people to actively and skillfully analyse information through questioning and reasoning, and result in a healthier society that can pro-actively address the climate crisis. While the issues of Climate Change and Health are global, they are also hyper-local and personal. This means that while the region in which we live determines one aspect of our experience, the wider reverberations link us to those in other regions, giving us the ability to empathise and share commonalities.</p>	Wexford County Council	Belfast, Wexford
Being Ourselves	<p>Being Ourselves is a Shared Island creative initiative connecting children from Attymass NS, Co. Mayo, and St. Colman's PS, Annaclone, Co. Down through the Cruinniú na nÓg Shared Island Project. Led by Kids' Own artists and writers, the project featured imaginative workshops exploring identity, place, and community. Sessions took place in Mayo and at the F.E. McWilliam Gallery in Banbridge, Co. Down, where children created art inspired by exhibitions and shared stories through drawing and writing. A joyful meetup at Enniskillen Castle brought both groups together for collaborative activities, games, and song. Their creativity culminated in a public exhibition at Ballina Civic Centre, showcasing their artwork alongside pieces from the TADA! exhibition. The project fostered new friendships, cultural exchange, and artistic confidence, with children expressing themselves through vibrant, personal creations. Supported by Creative Ireland's Shared Island initiative and Mayo County Council, Being Ourselves celebrates the power of creativity to connect communities and build a shared future.</p>	Mayo County Council	Mayo, Down

<i>Cruinniú for all</i>	<p>A vibrant and inclusive programme was delivered to celebrate community through creativity, imagination, and shared experiences. Designed to ensure that everyone felt welcome — the initiative invited children and young people of all abilities, with their families, to play, create, and connect.</p> <p>Recognising the diverse needs of participants, the programme offered a varied and adaptive schedule, including collaborations with a range of creatives. Specialised sessions were held cross border in Holy Family School, Cootehill, and Willowbridge School, Enniskillen, ensuring meaningful engagement within special educational settings.</p> <p>As part of Cruinniú na nÓg, a public family fun day was hosted at the fully inclusive Share Centre. The event featured interactive zones, sensory-friendly spaces, hands-on creative workshops, collaborative mural painting and inclusive dance and drumming.</p> <p>Trained staff supported individuals with disabilities. Activities were thoughtfully tailored to accommodate a range of sensory needs, ensuring a welcoming and enriching experience for all.</p>	Cavan County Council	Cavan, Fermanagh
<i>Bridging Borders, Embracing Diversity</i>	<p>As part of the Cruinniú na nÓg and Shared Island 2024 initiative, Donegal County Council partnered with Scoil Cholmcille and Eglington primary schools to deliver a cross-border, cross-community intercultural Arts and Cultural Diversity project.</p> <p>The ‘Bridging Borders, Embracing Diversity’ project established a cross-border, cross-community arts and cultural diversity programme for two primary schools—one in Donegal and one in Derry.</p> <p>This initiative was designed to encourage cultural exchange, promote understanding, and celebrate diversity among pupils, educators, and the wider community.</p> <p>Artists shared their skills with pupils from each school, their teachers, parents/guardians and grandparents. Using Dance/movement, storytelling and music pupils celebrated the diverse student populations through arts practice. This project took place during school hours over the week leading up to Cruinniú na nÓg, culminating with intercultural promotion days in each school.</p>	Donegal County Council	Derry, Donegal
<i>Border Beats</i>	<p>Border Beats was a Shared Island Cruinniú initiative that brought together children and young people from communities along the Monaghan–Fermanagh border, through music and the arts. The project's flagship Cruinniú Day event was held in Clones Library, selected for its accessibility to both sides of the border. Over 150 attendees enjoyed a vibrant programme featuring performances by Monaghan's Ukrainian Youth Ensemble, the cross-border Strum for Fun Ukulele group, Clones Youth Choir, and the Eco Beats sustainable drumming group. With additional Cruinniú funding, the project continued throughout autumn and winter 2024. During this time, children from Knockatallon (County Monaghan) and Maguiresbridge (County Fermanagh) created a series of murals inspired by the biodiversity of the Sliabh Beagh mountain area, which straddles the border. Meanwhile, children and young people from both counties collaborated to plan and rehearse for a Shared Island Cruinniú Christmas Concert, which took place in Knockatallon in December 2024.</p>	Monaghan County Council	Monaghan, Fermanagh

Circus and Beyond	<p>Doulab for Circus and Dance, based in South Dublin, collaborated with Circusful in Belfast in bringing together two groups of young people: Doulab Youth Ensemble from Dublin, the refugee community, and the travelling community, and in the North from Circusful's Youth Circus, and outreach participants. They used contemporary circus as a tool for artistic exchange and meaningful youth led cross-border collaboration, building strong connections over the course of 6 cross-border meetings, and 9 workshops within their own groups. They decided together (guided by the artist facilitators using Hub na nÓg framework) on a youth-led public performance in Dublin for Cruinniú na nÓg. They came together again to review the project and participated in a final evaluation workshop session. All parties to this project are highly experienced in working with marginalised communities, strongly increasing their success in overcoming the big challenges involved with bringing these young people together.</p>	South Dublin County Council	Dublin, Belfast
Convergence	<p>Convergence was a Shared Island multi-disciplinary youth arts project in 2024, that explored what a shared island means to two groups of young people from Tallaght and Derry/Londonderry. During the weeks preceding Cruinniú na nÓg, Freshly Ground Theatre worked with Creative Places MacUilliam in Tallaght, the Waterside Theatre and Arts Centre in Derry/Londonderry, the MakeyUppers and an LGBTQ+ group from the Rainbow Project, to explore what a shared Island means to them. During these workshops the groups used automatic writing prompts, physical tableaux and scenes, film and photography to explore place, space, community, otherness and connection to place and to create a 'care package' to send and share with the other group. During Cruinniú na nÓg, the young people from each group invited members of the public to their 'place' to contribute to the project through conversation and collective brainstorming. Post-boxes in each location were available for the public to share thoughts on what a shared island means.</p>	South Dublin County Council	Dublin, Derry
Our World – Celebration of Cultures	<p>In delivering Our World – Celebration of Cultures, a Shared Island, cross-community intercultural arts project, Donegal County Council partnered with the following primary schools: St. Thérèse's, Nazareth House, Good Shepherd (Derry). St. Mary's, Sessiaghoneill and Dooish (Donegal). This project promoted cultural exchange, mutual understanding and the celebration of diversity among pupils, educators, families and the wider community.</p> <p>Artists and creative practitioners led three full-day workshops in dance/movement, storytelling puppetry and music, engaging pupils and teachers. The diverse student body was reflected in the arts practices in working through themes of place, identity and belonging.</p> <p>The project strengthened cross-border collaboration between the Donegal and Derry-Londonderry communities and included identity puppets created in workshops. The project established a sustainable legacy by creating a model for future cross-border arts and cultural initiatives. Relationships built among schools, artists, and communities laid the foundation for continued collaboration, while creative outputs and shared experiences inspired lasting cultural appreciation and understanding.</p>	Donegal County Council	Dublin, Belfast, Fermanagh

Table 18: Creative Climate Action and Sustainability Projects

Project Title	Short Description	Lead Organisation	Locations
<i>Divergently Together</i>	This will empower neurodivergent communities to engage in climate action by platforming their voices and exploring ways in which climate policy can be more inclusive.	Dublin City University and Insight Centre DCU	Laois, Cavan, Fermanagh, Waterford, Galway, Dublin
<i>Shifting Tides and Sea Change: Creative Coastal Conversations</i>	The project aims to connect coastal communities along Carlingford Lough, to forge new connections between communities and local marine environments through a unique blend of practical ecology and collaborative creative arts.	The Wheel and NICVA	Rostrevor, Carlingford, Warrenpoint, Omeath, Greenore
<i>Creative Boardroom: Collaborate4 Climate</i>	This initiative aims to generate dynamic and creative solutions that can meaningfully address the complex environmental and social challenges that we currently face as a result of climate change.	NCAD	Dublin, Belfast

Table 19: Creative Youth on a Shared Island Projects

Project Title	Short Description	Lead Organisation	Locations
<i>To the Power of Three</i>	A creative exchange between communities in Derry, Dublin and Wexford exploring the importance of cultural connection, diversity, pride of place and what it means to be a young person in Ireland today through performances.	Tallaght Community Arts	Derry, Dublin and Wexford
<i>A Shared Island Song writing Project</i>	Delivered through a series of residential music 'hot houses' with and for children and young people.	Music Generation Laois	Laois, Offaly, and across Northern Ireland
<i>Living Legends: A Cross-Border Cultural Exchange of Stories, Myth and Landscape</i>	Young people will write their own new living legends based on their counterpart's story, drawing on the mythical landscape of the Aran Islands and the Giant's Causeway.	Narrative 4	Antrim, Aran Islands
<i>Future Parade</i>	Bringing together young people from communities in Belfast and Galway to investigate if parade can be utilised as a medium for sharing a new vision for the future, through workshops, residencies, and performances.	Macnas	Belfast, Galway
<i>Shared Lived Experience Through Creative Arts</i>	Working with 20 young people from Greater Belfast and Dublin, who have multiple and complex needs providing a safe space for them to tell their stories using 'Theatre of the Oppressed' as the creative medium.	Extern NI	Belfast, Dublin
<i>Creative Connections - Shared Writing Across the Island</i>	Engaging children and young people aged 15-24 through connected creative writing initiatives, including scriptwriting, poetry, prose, and song writing.	Fighting Words	Belfast, Dublin, Cork, Armagh, Monaghan, Down, Louth

Table 20: Creative Health and Wellbeing in the Community Projects

Project Title	Short Description	Lead Organisation	Locations
<i>Creative Cafés</i>	Working with social prescribers and community groups, creative workshops to promote social connection and health and wellbeing.	Monaghan County Council	Monaghan and Fermanagh
<i>Weaving Worlds Together</i>	Addressing social isolation, anxiety and loneliness by connecting communities through craftwork.	Kerry County Council	Ballyheigue, Listowel, Kenmare, Belfast, Omagh, South Armagh Kilkeel
<i>The Art of Life</i>	Supporting positive ageing and end of life care.	Cavan County Council	Cavan, Fermanagh, Tyrone
<i>'Dear Future Me' – Promoting Positive Mental Health Through Creative Expression On Our Shared Island</i>	Supporting the mental health of young people in Louth and Down through craft, heritage and performance.	Louth County Council	Louth, Down
<i>Take 5</i>	<p>The Take 5 creative health and wellbeing project aims for participants to build self-esteem and resilience and develop a creative mindset. The programme will take place over five weeks around five themes: 'give', 'be active', 'keep learning', 'take notice' and 'connect'; culminating in an event bringing all participants together.</p> <p>The project connects partners and participants in Donegal and Derry City and Strabane District Council areas with creative activities and cultural practitioners, to creatively explore a broad range of activities including visual and performing arts, heritage experiences, music, dance, drama, creative writing, storytelling, crafts, digital arts and gardening.</p>	Donegal County Council	Donegal, Derry City, Strabane

Appendix C - Evaluation Team

The evaluation team is a North South collaboration of M-CO, Quality Matters and EMcG Solutions. Together, we bring extensive experience in all-island and cross-regional programme development, policy evaluation, impact assessment, and performance measurement economic and non-economic impacts.

M-CO is a strategic design and project management consultancy. We bring over 25 years of experience designing, delivering and evaluating projects across the island of Ireland with government departments, local government, state agencies, creative industries, heritage organisations, higher education institutions, and experts in health and social care across the island of Ireland.

Quality Matters bring specialised expertise in evaluating the impact of social service provision within the not-for-profit and state agency sectors. Their core mission is to support the development of high-quality, evidence-based services, with a strong focus on measuring social impact and value.

EMcG Solutions, based in Northern Ireland and led by Dr. Eileen McGloin, brings significant experience in research, analysis, and evaluation within both the public and private sectors, with over 15 years specifically in European Funding, Feasibility Research and Analysis, Evaluation, and Strategy Development.

Dr. Simon O'Rafferty | Director In Charge

Simon is a strategic designer with extensive experience in strategy, evaluation, and service design. As the lead consultant on many similar projects with a wide range of clients, including Government Departments, State Agencies and Local Authorities State Agencies in Ireland and Northern Ireland Simon brings extensive experience in multi-stakeholder engagement and evaluation. Simon led the evaluation design, quality control and oversee data analysis and reporting.

Megan Etherton | Project Lead

Megan is a service designer specialising in strategic design research, stakeholder engagement, facilitation, co-design and strategy development. With a background in architecture, Megan has delivered projects for national, state and local government bodies in Ireland and Australia. Megan led the facilitation design and reporting.

Sarah McKendry | Senior Project Manager

Sarah is an architect and project manager with nine years' experience in the UK (including Northern Ireland) and Ireland across a variety of sectors including healthcare, transport and education. Her experience in delivering complex briefs for large public projects informs a client-focused approach to project management and service design.

Quality Matters – Caroline Gardner

Caroline, CEO of Quality Matters, has qualifications in sociology and community development, Social Return on Investment and Trauma-Informed Practices. Caroline brings over 20+ years' experience in Not-for-Profit management and consultancy, helping frontline services be as accessible and effective as possible. Caroline advised on the social impact and non-economic impacts aspects of evaluation and brought extensive knowledge of the not-for-profit sectors in Ireland.

Eileen McGloin | Strategic Evaluation Specialist

Eileen has over 25 years of experience in policy evaluation, impact assessment, and performance measurement, assessing both economic and non-economic impacts in public sector projects. She has led the design and delivery of evaluation frameworks that measure the social, environmental, and community benefits of government initiatives, all-island cooperation, rural development and tourism. Eileen advised on the non-economic impacts aspects of evaluation and brought knowledge of the not-for-profit sectors and community sectors in Northern Ireland.

Appendix D - List of Interviewees and Workshop Participants

Table 21: List of Interviewees and Workshop Participants

Event	Date	Participant Name	Project(s)
Pillar Leads Workshop	10.06.2025	Kate Delaney	<i>Creative Youth Pillar Lead</i>
Pillar Leads Workshop	10.06.2025	Adele Mealey	<i>Creative Climate Action and Sustainability Pillar Lead</i>
Pillar Leads Workshop	10.06.2025	Sheila Deegan	<i>Creative Communities and Cruinniú na nÓg Pillar Lead</i>
Pillar Leads Workshop	10.06.2025	Rebecca Minch	<i>Creative Health and Wellbeing Pillar Lead</i>
Pillar Leads Workshop	10.06.2025	Conall MacMichael	<i>Creative Ireland</i>
Evaluators Workshop	18.06.2025	Fiona Byrne	<i>Divergently Together</i>
Evaluators Workshop	18.06.2025	Paula Phelan	<i>Future Parade, Creative Connections - Shared Writing Across the Island</i>
Evaluators Workshop	18.06.2025	Máire Braniff	<i>Birds of a Feather</i>
Evaluators Workshop	18.06.2025	Lucy McKenna	<i>Creative Boardroom: Collaborate4Climate</i>
Evaluators Workshop	18.06.2025	Cheryl O'Dwyer	<i>Shared Lived Experience Through Creative Arts</i>
Mixed Workshop A	30.07.2025	Jennifer Webster	<i>To the Power of Three</i>
Mixed Workshop A	30.07.2025	Anita Petry	<i>To the Power of Three</i>
Mixed Workshop A	30.07.2025	Bronwen Barrett	<i>To the Power of Three</i>
Mixed Workshop A	30.07.2025	Sorcha Shanahan	<i>To the Power of Three</i>
Mixed Workshop A	30.07.2025	Tara Doyle	<i>Shifting Tides and Sea Change: Creative Coastal Communities</i>
Mixed Workshop A	30.07.2025	Alexander McMaster	<i>Shifting Tides and Sea Change: Creative Coastal Communities</i>
Mixed Workshop A	30.07.2025	Suzie Cahn	<i>Shifting Tides and Sea Change: Creative Coastal Communities</i>
Mixed Workshop A	30.07.2025	Victoria McCormack	<i>Future Parade</i>
Mixed Workshop A	30.07.2025	Dermot McGowan	<i>Future Parade</i>
Mixed Workshop A	30.07.2025	Maria Tivnan	<i>Future Parade</i>
Mixed Workshop A	30.07.2025	Sharon Howe	<i>Dance Connects, The Art of Life</i>

Mixed Workshop B	30.07.2025	Eva Birdthistle	<i>Birds of a Feather</i>
Mixed Workshop B	30.07.2025	Helen Walsh	<i>Birds of a Feather</i>
Mixed Workshop B	30.07.2025	Audrey Murray	<i>Birds of a Feather</i>
Mixed Workshop B	30.07.2025	Deirdre Leahy	<i>Birds of a Feather</i>
Mixed Workshop B	30.07.2025	Natalie Yaffw	<i>Birds of a Feather</i>
Mixed Workshop B	30.07.2025	Fiona McSweeney	<i>Birds of a Feather</i>
Mixed Workshop B	30.07.2025	Bernie McGuire	<i>Birds of a Feather</i>
Mixed Workshop B	30.07.2025	Jackie Goode	<i>Birds of a Feather</i>
Mixed Workshop B	30.07.2025	Karina Charles Lynch	<i>Dance Connects in Rural Border Region</i>
Mixed Workshop B	30.07.2025	Katherine Collins	<i>Building Shared Creative Communities</i>
Mixed Workshop B	30.07.2025	Jayne Clarke	<i>Building Shared Creative Communities</i>
Mixed Workshop B	30.07.2025	John Hastings	<i>Circus Explored</i>
Mixed Workshop B	30.07.2025	Laura O’Keeffe	<i>Divergently Together</i>
Mixed Workshop B	30.07.2025	Ailbhe O’Connor	<i>Divergently Together</i>
Mixed Workshop B	30.07.2025	Deirdre McCabe	<i>Divergently Together</i>
Mixed Workshop B	30.07.2025	Aoife O’Boyle	<i>To the Power of Three</i>
Mixed Workshop B	30.07.2025	Zoe McSparron	<i>To the Power of Three</i>
Mixed Workshop B	30.07.2025	Deryn O’Callaghan	<i>To the Power of Three</i>
Mixed Workshop B	30.07.2025	Jenny MacDonald	<i>To the Power of Three</i>
Mixed Workshop B	30.07.2025	Heather White	<i>Creative Boardroom: Collaborate4Climate</i>
Mixed Workshop B	30.07.2025	Lucy McKenna	<i>Creative Boardroom: Collaborate4Climate</i>
Mixed Workshop B	30.07.2025	Karen McCague	<i>Creative Cafes</i>
Interview	25.06.2025	Eva Birdthistle	<i>Birds of a Feather</i>
Interview	25.06.2025	Helen Walsh	<i>Birds of a Feather</i>
Interview	2.07.2025	Katherine Collins	<i>Building Shared Creative Communities</i>

Interview	19.06.2025	Mary Conlon	<i>Farm Walks</i>
Interview	19.06.2025	Philip Delamere	<i>Farm Walks</i>
Interview	19.06.2025	Joeleen Lynch	<i>Farm Walks II</i>
Interview	19.06.2025	Etain McCooley	<i>Laces of Ireland</i>
Interview	19.06.2025	Sarah O'Farrell	<i>Laces of Ireland</i>
Interview	25.06.2025	Daithí Ramsay	<i>Shared Histories: Diverse Views</i>
Interview	25.06.2025	Jeremy Howard	<i>Shared Histories: Diverse Views</i>
Interview	25.06.2025	Trish Lambe	<i>Shared Histories: Diverse Views</i>
Interview	19.06.2025	Emer Sharkey	<i>Sharing Songs and Unforgettable Voices</i>
Interview	19.06.2025	Lilian Whelan	<i>Sharing Songs and Unforgettable Voices</i>
Interview	17.06.2025	Grace Mitchell	<i>The Ties That Bind</i>
Interview	17.06.2025	Emma Dwyer	<i>The Ties That Bind</i>
Interview	1.07.2025	Lucy Medlecott	<i>Circus Explored</i>
Interview	1.07.2025	Tamara Gangnus	<i>Circus Explored</i>
Interview	1.07.2025	Cath McBride	<i>Circus Explored</i>
Interview	2.07.2025	Colm Ó Cuanacháin	<i>Creative Connections - Shared Writing Across the Island</i>
Interview	3.07.2025	Victoria McCormack	<i>Future Parade</i>
Interview	9.07.2025	Rosa Flannery	<i>Isle of Song</i>
Interview	25.06.2025	Jennifer Webster	<i>To the Power of Three</i>
Interview	25.06.2025	Vlad Gurdis	<i>To the Power of Three</i>
Interview	15.07.2025	Victoria Durrer	<i>Dance Connects in Rural Border Regions</i>
Interview	15.07.2025	Aoife McGrath	<i>Dance Connects in Rural Border Regions</i>
Interview	7.07.2025	Rachel Gleeson	<i>Living Legends: A all-island Cultural Exchange of Stories, Myth and Landscape</i>
Interview	10.07.2025	Fiona Byrne	<i>Divergently Together</i>
Interview	10.07.2025	Alan Burns	<i>Divergently Together</i>

Interview	10.07.2025	Rachael Winters	<i>Dear Future Me</i>
Interview	10.07.2025	Moya Hodgers	<i>Dear Future Me</i>
Interview	10.07.2025	Kevin Moran	<i>Dear Future Me</i>
Interview	21.07.2025	Louise Allen	<i>Creative Boardroom: Collaborate4Climate</i>
Interview	15.07.2025	Audrey Wilson	<i>Creative Cafés</i>
Interview	4.07.2025	Jessica Fuller	<i>Weaving Worlds</i>
Interview	1.07.2025	Suzi Cahn	<i>Shifting Tides and Sea Change: Creative Coastal Conversations</i>
Interview	6.08.2025	Sharon Howe	<i>The Art of Life</i>
Interview	5.02.2026	Cheryl O'Dwyer	<i>Shared Lived Experience Through Creative Arts</i>

Appendix E – Research Questions

The interviews will explore three primary research questions, each with several sub questions:

Primary Research Question 1:

How effectively did the programme foster all-island collaboration and shared island outcomes?

- How do teams interpret and apply the core objectives of the programme in their specific contexts?
- What approaches have teams developed to foster cross-community engagement?
- How do teams integrate the programme's underlying assumptions about creativity as an enabler of public dialogue, social innovation, and institutional change?
- What partnerships have been established, and how are these partnerships maintained?

Primary Research Question 2:

What challenges and opportunities have project teams encountered in their work?

- What barriers exist to all-island collaborations, and how have teams addressed these?
- What unexpected opportunities have emerged during project implementation?
- How have teams navigated differences in policy, funding, or administrative structures between jurisdictions?
- What strategies have proven most effective in engaging communities typically excluded from cultural life?

Primary Research Question 3:

What impact are projects having on communities and all-island relationships?

- What evidence exists of positive attitude change, deeper cross-community understanding, and enhanced wellbeing among participants?
- How are projects contributing to the formation of lasting networks and partnerships?
- What influence are projects having on local and national policy?
- How are projects addressing the specific challenges identified in each thematic pillar (Youth, Communities, Health and Wellbeing, and Climate Action)?

Interview Structure and Questions

Introduction (5 minutes)

- Welcome and thank participant
- Introduce yourself and the wider team
- Briefly explain the purpose of the interview and how it fits into the larger research project
- Review confidentiality and data protection measures
- Explain the interview format and approximate duration (1 hour)
- Remind participant they can skip questions or take breaks
- Ask if they have any questions before beginning

Opening Questions (5-10 minutes)

- Could you tell me about your role in the Creative Ireland Shared Island project?
- How did you/your organisation become involved with the programme?
- What aspects of the programme's objectives particularly resonate with your work?
- Primary Research Question 1:
How effectively did the programme foster all-island collaboration and shared island outcomes?
- Primary Research Question 2:
What challenges and opportunities have project teams encountered in their work?
- Primary Research Question 3:
What impact are projects having on communities and all-island relationships?

Main Questions - Theme 1: Implementation (15 minutes)

Primary Research Question 1:

How effectively did the programme foster all-island collaboration and shared island outcomes?

- How are project teams implementing the Creative Ireland Shared Island programme?
- Could you describe the specific project(s) you're involved with?
- How does your project address the programme's goal of fostering cross-community engagement?

Probe: What specific activities or approaches have you used?

Probe: How have you adapted the programme to your local context?

- How have you incorporated creativity as a tool for dialogue and understanding in your work?
- Could you tell me about the partnerships you've developed through this project?

Probe: How were these partnerships established?

Probe: What has helped maintain these relationships?

- What have you learned through the process to date?

Main Questions - Theme 2:

Challenges and Opportunities (15 minutes)

Primary Research Question 2:

What challenges and opportunities have project teams encountered in their work?

- What have been the main challenges you've faced in implementing your project?

Probe: How have you addressed these challenges?

- Have you encountered any specific barriers to all-island collaboration?

Probe: How have you navigated differences between jurisdictions?

- What unexpected opportunities or developments have emerged during your project?
- What approaches have been most successful in engaging communities that might typically be excluded from cultural activities?

Probe: Were there any groups that were particularly difficult to engage?

Main Questions - Theme 3: Impact (15 minutes)

Primary Research Question 3: What impact are projects having on communities and all-island relationships?

- What changes have you observed in participants or communities as a result of your project?

Probe: Have you seen evidence of attitude changes or deeper cross-community understanding?

Probe: Have you observed impacts on wellbeing among participants?

- What are the key outcomes you are hoping to achieve?

Probe: If wellbeing is being used – how do they define or measure this?

- How are you measuring or documenting the impact of your work?

Probe: What kind of evidence are you collecting / ask in relation to each outcome?

- Did you plan to influence local policy or agency practice at local or national level through the work OR did opportunities arise for this?

Probe: Have there been any policy discussions or changes already?

- What lasting networks or partnerships do you think might continue beyond the life of this specific project?

Closing Questions (5 minutes)

- What do you see as the most significant achievement of your project so far?
- What advice would you give to others starting similar all-island cultural initiatives?
- What advice would you give yourself if you were starting again?
- Is there anything else about your experience with the Creative Ireland Shared Island programme that you'd like to share?

Conclusion (5 minutes)

- Thank participant for their time and insights
- Explain next steps in the research process
- Remind them how their data will be used and protected
- Provide contact information for follow-up questions
- Ask if they would like to receive a summary of research findings

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