



# MUSEUMS AND THE ROAD TO RESILIENT RECOVERY IN IRELAND

THE IRISH MUSEUMS ASSOCIATION (IMA)

*This document has been prepared on behalf of the wider museum sector through our embedded feedback loops and discussions with members from the National Cultural Institutions, the Local Authority Museums Network and similarly funded and/or operated art museums, and independent museums.*



*‘(Museums) help us understand our place in the world when life is in such flux’*  
Tony Butler, Derby Museums Trust

In reaching this critical juncture in the midst of the global pandemic, we are facing the inevitability of an economic recession and our communities and sectors are coming together to support Government in setting out a roadmap for the future.

Without doubt, museums have a pivotal role to play in social and economic recovery and resilience of the nation. Through their collections, encompassing the gamut of sciences and humanities, they support new research, open conversations, and help heal. They are integral to placemaking and our national identity, one that will be impacted by this collective experience.

Museums are also defined by their role in education and community building. They provide our society with programmes that include life-long learning, promote well-being, advocate inclusion and diversity, foster social cohesion, protect our most vulnerable, and play an important role in reconciliation on the island of Ireland.

They are one of the main reason visitors come to Ireland, bolstering the tourism and hospitality sectors, and are intrinsic to our civic infrastructure, supporting urban and local regeneration and revitalising our towns and city centres.

With over 200 museums across Ireland, attracting in excess of 8,000,000 visitors per year, directly employing over 1,500 staff and 1,000 long-term volunteers, they are integral to the creative economy and are important stakeholders within the Irish cultural sector and related industries.

Recognition of their role has been identified by the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sports and Media (TCAGSM), who in 2019 extended approximately €1,800,000 through various initiatives to the wider independent and regional museum sector, in addition to investment in their infrastructures through the Department’s Cultural Capital Scheme, *Project Ireland 2040 -Investing in our Culture, Language & Heritage 2018 – 2027*.

However, it is apparent that support of their activities is in need of reenergising. As we globally enter a new phase, one that will test our resources, museums will be vital in not only helping our citizens rebuild after Covid-19 but also reimagine a more sustainable future.



## *Working towards Recovery: Immediate Actions*

Within the National Framework for Living with Covid-19, museums are the only sector either open or closed between levels. As a result, not only are museums dealing with economic strain, but also the eroding of public confidence in a sector that places immense value on their public benefit, contribute to our nation's well-being, and are considered highly trusted institutions.

A more nuanced approach, in particular relation to level 3, with museums being permitted to open with enhanced measures (no events/tours, an emphasis on pods, reduced capacity and dedicated timeslots) should be considered. Actions such as contact tracing or temperature checks could additionally support central efforts in monitoring and curtailing outbreaks.

Core funding for independent museums not in receipt of public funding. Aid for areas such as collection management and conservation (preservation), insurance, rates, security, and facilities are not only key in ensuring the survival of these museums but will also benefit local social and economic infrastructures and regeneration of town centres.

An additional annual core funding package of €1,600,000 in awards of up to €40,000 to be extended to stabilise independent & professionally run local museums. With adequate resourcing, the IMA would be ideally placed to work with the Dept. TCAGSM in identifying priorities and sustainable investments and administering this on their behalf. National examples: Arts Council of Ireland [Visual Artists Workspace Scheme](#)

An extension of the state insurance scheme to museums in receipt of public funding, providing relief to smaller museums for whom this represents a major percentage of annual running costs. International examples: Danish, Italian, Norwegian, British and Swedish indemnity schemes; ICOM report [State Indemnity Schemes](#)

Ireland holds relatively limited data on the museum sector. Investment in this area is a priority in terms of informing both government and public of the value of museums, identifying areas of concern and growth, and monitoring the sector. Currently the IMA has been the main collector and carries out a [survey](#) every 10 years, last capturing data from 2014.

An immediate research investment of €40,000 to capture comprehensive data from 2019 (pre-Covid 19) allowing the sector to benchmark against this as it recovers. This should be carried out at minimum every 5 years with annual monitoring also taking place to provide an accurate overview of operations within museums: visitors, staff, closures, redevelopments. International examples: Finland's [National Board of Antiquities](#) and [EGMUS \(European Group of Museum Statistics\)](#)



## *Specific Actions to build Resilience*

### FUNDING

In recent decades we have seen a rapidly evolving sector with museums diversifying their structures. Today, most Irish museums operate as non-profit independent organisations, retaining public benefit at the heart of what they do, and efforts to self-generate income have increased. Unfortunately it is those museums who have been most successful in diversifying their funding that are most at risk. Given their non-profit structure, many cannot avail of business supports and urgent public investment in the wider museum sector is essential for their survival. Additionally we need to provide security and empower those already supported through public funding with actions that will allow them to maintain services and enhance their development and planning.

Multi-annual funding for NCIs and cultural institutions identified as ‘meeting a specific cultural need and support the high level goal of the Dept. TCAGSM in relation to enhancing access to the arts, culture and film sectors and recognising the social and economic role of these sectors in Ireland’ under the A6 funding, categories A1 – A3.

Annual grant payment structures similar to the [Arts Council funding](#) for organisations whereas instalments are made upfront with a declaration of assurance, alleviating those museums for whom loss of earned income is impacting cashflow and their ability to avail of funding initiatives otherwise eligible for. Extend this model to programme initiatives, with increased early announcements of schemes and timelines.

Increased Cooperation with NI funding aimed at building long term strategic cross-border cultural partnerships to be extended by the Dept of Foreign Affairs, mitigating the potentially destabilising impacts of Brexit. With additional resourcing, the IMA could potentially administer this given its role as an all-Ireland organisation.  
National example: Dept. TCAGSM [Cooperation with NI initiative](#) which could be complemented by a strategic fund or expanded.

Funding for internal research, a core role of the museum, to be extended through the Irish Research Council. This could potentially lead to establishing the groundwork to complement application processes to EU funded programmes, easing pressure on national budgets. International example: Arts Council England’s [Research Grant Programme](#)



## *Specific Actions to build Resilience*

### CAPACITY BUILDING

With entry level salaries in the museum sector under the national living wage, new leadership within the sector is still recovering from the last recession with few mid-senior professionals under the age of 35. Investment in staff is core to equipping future leadership that is representative of our communities and audiences, empowers co-ownership, and ensures values of diversity and inclusion are embedded within our museums.

A programme of supports offering knowledge exchange and co-mentoring across sectors on how to rethink business models and strategies, meaningfully connect with audiences, and build sustainable, collaborative relationships with community leaders. This could be extended through the Dept. TCAGSM, the Dept. of Education, or Dept of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, via organisations such as IMA or relevant agencies.

National/International examples: Arts Council's [Capacity Building Support Scheme](#) or Georgian Museum Association's ['Be Museumer'](#)

Current initiatives aimed at building fund raising capacity being extended more broadly across the cultural sector, also providing training to existing staff.

National example: Arts Council's [RAISE](#) and Business to Arts' [New Stream](#) programme for arts orgs

Sustained programme of training aimed at enhancing digital engagement skills among staff, who are now looking at blended virtual-physical learning, exhibitions, and research programmes. This would additionally equip those working in behind the scenes areas of the museums such as collections management and conservation to engage the public, enhancing understanding of the full work of the museum and their value.

National example: IMA's [Interpreting Museums](#) programme

Over 40% of Irish museums are 'very dependent' on volunteerism. Additional resourcing to be extended to support both these services and the volunteers themselves through alternative engagement models and capacity-building.

Standardised schedule of pay levels and grades in the public museum sector, reflecting the expertise and professional leadership of those working within the Museum sector.



## *Specific Actions to build Resilience*

### PROMOTION

Drop in tourism and associated spend loss has severely impacted the museum sector, with footfall in Dublin museums standing at approximately 7-10% of previous years. With museums playing an integral role in promoting Irish Culture, initiatives to expand reach and guarantee access to collections as per [ICOM's Code of Ethics](#) would be welcomed.

Resourcing of an awareness campaign for museums, to include shared branding and user-friendly online platform for access to museum content available to audiences, promoting museum activities, encouraging collaborations, and supporting well-being.

International examples: [Digimuseo](#) (Finland) and Deutscher Museumsbund (Germany)

Expansion of existing programmes to include the cultural heritage sector or creation of similar programmes aimed at developing new and diverse audiences, strengthening international networking, connecting with diaspora, promoting Irish Culture abroad both physically and online; additionally attracting investment to Ireland and international recognition.

National example: [Culture Ireland](#)

Investment in long-term digital strategy, including but not limited to digitisation of collections among the wider museum sector, would allow museums to increase their online output in a more sustainable way, focusing on their USP and proactive online engagement. For more information see [NEMO report](#).

International examples: [UK digitisation funding](#) and [Canada Council for the Arts](#)

Audience research to gain insight into who and how audiences are engaging with our cultural venues, assisting museums in strategic planning, programme development, and income generation.

International example: ANI and NIMC's [Visitor Profiling report](#)



## *Specific Actions to build Resilience*

### COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND EDUCATION

A defining remit of the museum is their role in education and communities, particularly evident throughout the pandemic as museums continued to connect and support schools, families and our most vulnerable members of society. However, staff and those temporarily employed through the creative industries have historically been the roles most at risk during times of recession. Bolstering their role through recognition and support will be pivotal in securing these services and supporting the role museums play under the Creative Ireland Alignment Plan (September 2017).

Expansion of current education – arts portals and schemes to include museum activity or development of a dedicated platform that links the wider sector of educators (history, sciences, etc) and museums and enables and promotes co-creation and engagement between our wider communities and museums.

National example: Dept. of Education and TCAGSM's [Arts in Education](#); Creative Ireland's [Creative Communities](#)

Investment in the roll out of online learning in the classroom by museums by establishing formal links with the Dept. of Education's JCT coordinators for post-primary, especially at Junior Cert level.

National example: [Arts in Education charter](#)

Encourage collaborative doctoral awards that support effective partnerships between academia and the cultural heritage sector, recognising collections as integral components of research infrastructure that can provide insight and data into issues such as climate change, political and social challenges, medicine and health.

International Examples: [Arts and Humanities Research Council](#), Portugal's [Roadmap of Research infrastructures](#)



## *Specific Actions to build Resilience*

### LEADERSHIP

With responsibility for museums falling under a range of departments, there is potential to reinforce the sector and the commitment in the Programme for Government to a dedicated collaborative taskforce to sustain recovery and beyond Covid-19.

Expansion of this to an overarching group for the development and support of museums formed by the representatives of the Dept. TCAGSM, Dept. of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, and Dept. of Public Expenditure and Reform, and relevant agencies and bodies, which would work to ensure the long-term sustainability of our museums.

Support the Museum Standards Programme for Ireland (MSPI), coordinated by the Heritage Council, to assist museums plan for the immediate future and response to the impact of Covid-19 and to ensure that Museums can maintain accreditation.

Significant responsibility for culture lies within our Local Authorities, who hold regional collections of national importance, are drivers of cultural activity, and are important players in both the economy and community of a place. Stabilising offerings and provision of supports will be key to widespread recovery.

Sustain current levels of support within local authorities to museums to enable them to develop, continue and expand regional and local collections and cultural actions and a recommitment to development of the strategic cultural partnerships within local councils as established through the Creative Ireland programme.

Develop and safeguard material culture held in local authorities without existing structures to support their interpretation and display and encourage funding of regional cultural offerings through LEADER funding and Local Enterprise partnerships.