



## Public Engagement Policy and Action Plan

Dublin International Film Festival (DIFF) is committed to ensuring strong public engagement is at the heart of all that we do. Informed by our *Strategy (2022 – 2027)*, our priorities and values highlight how our work excites and entertains audiences, engages participants, showcases the art of filmmaking and presents the best in Irish and world cinema.

The Arts Council's strategy *Making Great Art Work* has a twin focus on the artist and public engagement. There is strong connection between the Council's resolve to support artists 'to make excellent work which is enjoyed and valued' while enabling more people to 'enjoy high-quality arts experiences' and our strategic priorities.

Informed by quantitative data sets & qualitative survey feedback and learnings from on-going audience development work and public engagement activities, our Public Engagement Policy and Action Plan encompasses all aspects of our work, including curation & programming, communication & marketing, box office, and social media activity.

Our Engagement Action Plan is a 'living' document, and our approach to implementing its actions are agile and responsive. Our action plan has identified a range of measures that we will monitor, to track delivery against our stated objectives but also to help us understand how we are actively contributing to the cultural landscape.

### Public Engagement Policy Action Plan Priorities:

- **Increasing Engagement and Growing our Audiences**

DIFF showcases a programme of new, innovative and exciting Irish and world cinema at our annual festival, complementing other film festivals programmes and regular cinema exhibition. To amplify and complement our festival programme, we are developing and growing our year-round programme of activities (screenings, workshops), which we believe strengthens our brand and increases our audience reach and impact.

To achieve this, we are focusing on developing and growing our engagement with young audiences, older audiences, regional audiences, and audiences with access needs. In the process actively addressing barriers including access to programme and activities information, economic accessibility and ensuring a wide diversity of programming choices and embracing inclusion.

- **Deepening Engagement**

Building on our track record, we maintain our commitment to audience development opportunities including post-screening events like audience Q&As and public interviews giving access to a wide range of national and international filmmakers and their artistic and creative insights into the filmmaking process.

We will develop our existing programme to include additional events and screenings to encourage year-round audience engagement with the festival.

- **Diversifying Engagement**

With the assistance of our Activation partners, our network of embassies and educational work, we are working to increase access to diverse audiences both in Dublin and beyond. As highlighted in our **EDI**

**Policy** and **EDI Action Plan**, we are committed to ensuring that the principles underpinning equality, diversity and inclusion are embedded in all that we do.

Strengthened by our values of honesty, integrity, objectivity and impartiality, our best practice approach is deeply rooted in our daily work practices ensuring we are open, transparent and engaged with all our colleagues, partners, audiences and participants.

- **Growing our community**

Our community comprises artists, filmmakers, audiences and participants, supported by an engaged team and committed board of directors.

We work to enable all those who share our love of film, from the professional to the enthusiast, to achieve their creative potential. DIFF embraces and values all forms of film practice.

**Our artistic policy can be best summed up as follows:**

*When programming a 'best of fest' festival, often described as an 'Audience Festival', we aspire each year to present a programme which will simultaneously satisfy a cinephile, engage regular cinema goers and intrigue a casual attendee. We want to build on the current audience's knowledge of cinema and amplify it with new discoveries and rediscoveries of classics. We also want to be relevant to the Irish film industry and new talent.*

We recognise and welcome new ways of working in film and film presentation through interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary practice.

*Key selection criteria include originality, quality of filmmaking, geographical range and relevance to Irish audiences. Preference is given to first time and emerging filmmakers and the festival has a long-established policy of supporting female filmmakers.*

- **Leading on our Public Engagement Policy and Action Plan**

Our board and team are at the forefront of this action plan with brainstorming and development days included in our annual workplan. Informed by regular sessions with our partners, we seek and implement feedback and reviews from our young & older film critics, young programmers' groups and our Picturehouse partners. We encourage active engagement with audiences through post screening surveys and focus groups which contribute to our ongoing communications strategy and programming plans.

We also use regular clinics and industry meetings to review our engagement with filmmakers and distribution partners to continue to expand our partnerships and contribute to our leadership role, growing influence and engagement across the arts spectrum.

For example, with our 2024 festival edition, we recorded the following successes:

We engaged with over **19,200** people across **10 days**, which comprised screening **138 films** from **50 countries**, shown across **14 venues**, including major programmes at the **Light House Cinema** and the **Irish Film Institute**, including **16** public events, **15** industry events, and **40** post-screening **Q&As**.

Over **61 international guests** including **filmmakers, producers, programmers** and **journalists** participated in events across the festival, which generated a **Press / Editorial value of €13.7 million**, including **advertising value of €4.5 million**. We strengthened our media partnerships with **RTÉ, Screen International, Pearl & Dean**, and **Film Ireland**, which considerably extends our visibility and reach.

Currently we know: **40%** of our audience is aged **18 – 34** and **48%** aged **35 – 65**.

Over the past year we recorded a **34% increase in social media followers** and a **13% increase of mailing list subscribers to 15,284**. Building on these statistics, highlighted below, we outline our:

- **Target Participants and Engagement Approach**

### **Young audiences (under 25)**

We reach young audiences through targeted marketing and social media campaigns. We encourage participation through young programmers, young film critics and young Irish curators' programmes.

### **Older audiences (over 60)**

Participation of older audiences (over 60s) is encouraged through Picturehouse, Screen8 and Older Critics projects, and includes our developing partnership with Bealtaine Festival (Age & Opportunity).

### **Regional Audiences**

The First Frame programme is a national programme which includes a network of over 50 film courses including third level and the Education & Training Boards. Our First Frame initiative will take place in Limerick for the second time in 2024.

The festival has maintained its Programmer network drawn from festivals and venues across Ireland and updated to include new venues every 2 months.

### **Audiences With Access Needs**

Audiences with access needs have been a particular focus over the past few years. Our catalogue now includes information on public transport, accessible buildings and disabled parking and we have made design changes to our website to make it more accessible.

We have worked with Hidden Disabilities & Sunflower Programme to make the festival venues more comfortable places for our neurodivergent audiences, including hidden disabilities training for all volunteers.

Each year we are increasing the number of films shown with HOH captions, in addition to adding audio descriptions to a growing number of film screenings. This is an area we are actively working on with partners, distributors and other stakeholder, to ensure all films we screen are audio-described.

### **Economic Accessibility**

To address economic accessibility, we are holding our ticket prices at 2023 levels, offering ticket bundles and introducing heavily discounted tickets for 5% of the audience at each screening.

### **Key measurements tools we use:**

- Audience ticket sales and attendance
- Digital Reach – across social media platforms
- Press Impact – PRV, ARV & Editorial Reach Statistics
- Partner Activations
- Increased sign up to mailing lists and newsletters
- Increased engagement with groups and participants requesting to join our programmes such as younger/older film critics and community projects
- Audience surveys and focus groups
- D&I Surveys of filmmakers, festival team, board and volunteers
- Testimonials and anecdotal feedback
- Patrons and partners feedback.

We have developed a connected set of objectives that act as key performance indicators and help us measure and review the health and success of the festival. Each objective has three tactics that are implemented across programme, production and communications that ensure positive progression.

## **Objective 1**

Increase overall festival attendance by 15% to 22,000 people

### Actions

1. Diversify attendance/improve cultural representation of audiences, in line with EDI Plan
2. Increase capacity of skills development and industry events
3. Develop relevant and representative marketing materials that appeal to target audiences.

## **Objective 2**

Improve the quality of the festival experience, raising the 'quality of experience' rating to 8.5 (out of 10)

### Actions

1. Build on success of 2024 by sustaining audience relationship outside the core festival through engaging communications strategies & targeted marketing campaigns, as outlined in Engagement Plan
2. Continue to develop core festival infrastructure, including consolidating Festival Hub at The Complex, box office mechanics and clear brand positioning
3. Invest in key staff (core and contract) to ensure best-practice and ambitious delivery.

## **Objective 3**

Develop and diversify our volunteer programme, increasing our cohort from 40 to 60 participants

### Actions

1. Work with our activation partners to identify and engage new and culturally diverse volunteers
2. Develop a 'talent pipeline' approach where volunteers can develop particular skills relevant to their interests
3. Identify an experienced Volunteer Coordinator who brings significant expertise to the recruitment and re-enrolling process.

## **Monitoring and Evaluating Success**

Audience feedback informs everything we do. Feedback from our community and outreach projects form the basis of what projects we will continue and expand in the future.

Our Public Engagement Policy and Action Plan is a 'living' document, our approach to implementing its actions remain agile and responsive; implementation is led by the Executive Festival Director, with the overall team responsible for its delivery. Oversight rests with the Board of Directors.

Our action plan has identified measures that we will monitor, to track delivery against our stated objectives but also to help us understand how we are actively contributing to the cultural life of our community.

We actively encourage feedback, and we will use quantitative and qualitative analysis tools supported by annual self-review to inform how we will evaluate and monitor our progress. Quantitative tracking of activity and participant feedback will inform programme development and delivery. To this we will incorporate analysis of existing data, focus groups, qualitative research methodologies and other evidence gathering to specifically track the success and impact of achieving our strategic priorities.