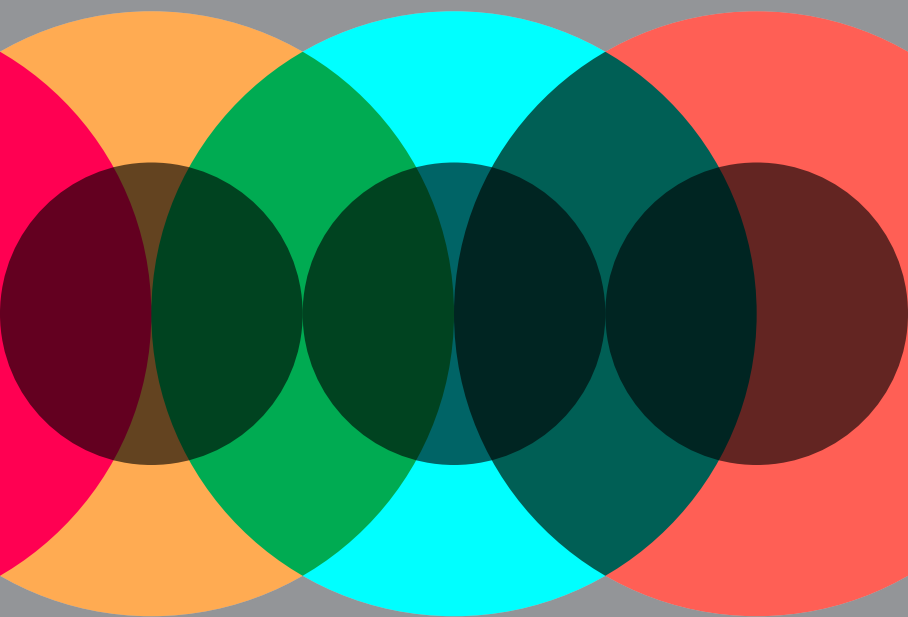
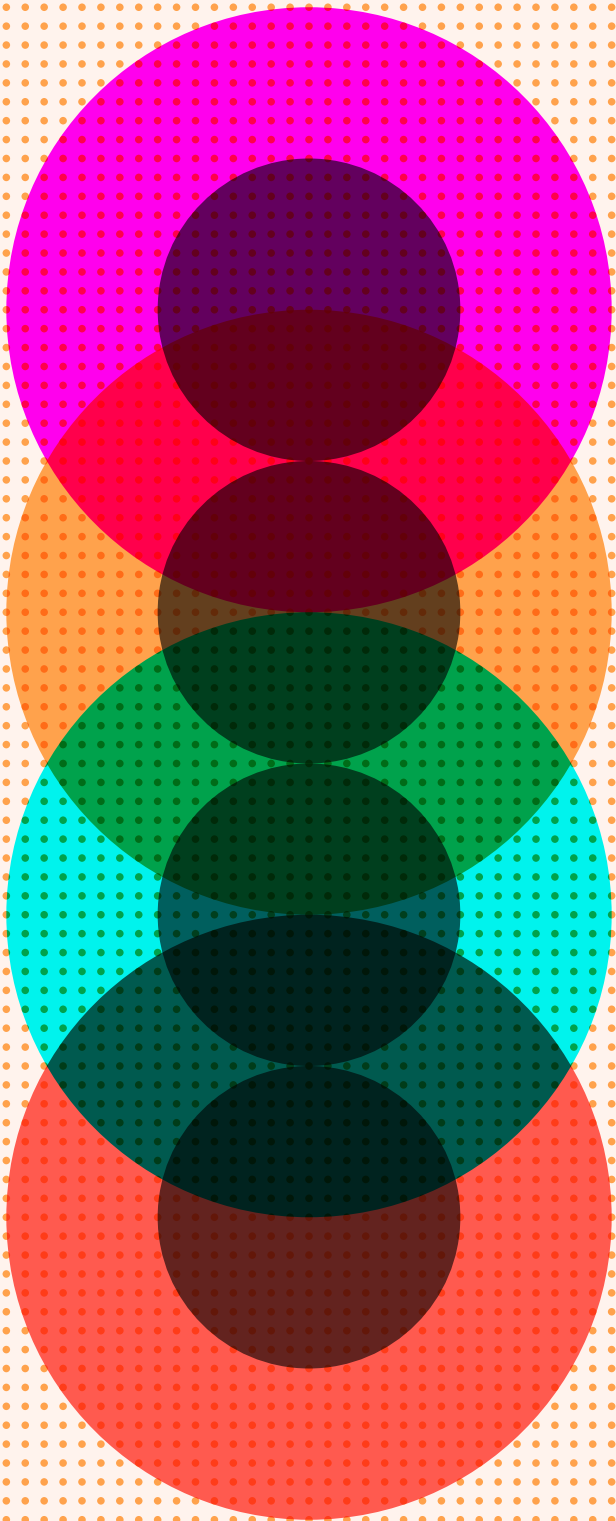


exploring and thinking award 2025–26



A Collaborative Framework for Early Childhood Arts
Provision in the Dublin Region.



Contents

04 Introduction

05 Background

06 Objectives

06 Priorities

07 Purpose

08 Bursary Awards

09 Eligibility

10 Key Dates

11 Proposals

11 Timeline

12 Bursary Range

13 Submissions

14 Queries

15 Applications

16 Notes

Introduction

Exploring and thinking is a collaborative framework for early childhood arts in the Dublin region. It came about in 2016 when the four Dublin local authorities South Dublin County, Fingal County, Dublin City and Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County partnered for the first time to collectively consider early childhood arts provision in the Dublin region.

Fingal County Council
Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council
Dublin City Council
South Dublin County Council

Background

Each Dublin Local Authority supports early childhood arts practice, provision, partnership and policy that is responsive to local motivations and need.

In 2016 the project partners received funding under the Arts Council's Invitation to Collaboration Scheme, which supports innovative and ambitious local authority collaborations. The Exploring & Thinking 2016 / 2017 partnership commissioned the research and creation of new artworks with local engagement programmes in arts and non-traditional arts venues.

In January 2019 the partnership hosted a public sharing event at the National Concert Hall to share the commissioned work and reflect on early childhood arts practice with artists, educators and policy makers. A publication capturing a review of the commissioning process, outputs and impacts of the collaborative framework, alongside additional research conducted among the artists and key personnel was presented on the day. Informed by the review and feedback from the public sharing event, the Exploring & Thinking Bursary Awards aim to support emerging and established artists that wish to develop a practice in early childhood arts.

The first Exploring & Thinking Bursary Awards were allocated in 2019, funding a range of supports for artists. In 2025 the partnership initiated talks with the Dublin Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSCs) with the aim of increasing opportunities for children to access and benefit from arts engagement. Now we invite artists to seek support to further develop their practice in 2026.

Objectives

- 1** To support artistic ambition in cross-artform collaborations, professional development and the research and development of new work in early childhood arts
- 2** To reach new early childhood arts audiences in under-served communities and neighbourhoods
- 3** To stimulate dialogue between the Dublin local authorities, Dublin Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSCs), artists, early childhood educators and organisations
- 4** To build on current research investigating practice across artforms, professional disciplines and context
- 5** To generate advocacy in early childhood arts

Priorities

- 1** Access with an emphasis on marginalised children
- 2** Quality of practice that is evidence and standards based
- 3** Positive impact on artistic practice and the wider early childhood sector
- 4** Focus on Artist that is responsive to emerging and established practitioners
- 5** Sustainability with actions that are achievable, realistic and measurable

Purpose

Early childhood arts includes a wide range of different arts practices and creative experiences with/for children aged 0-5 years in different contexts. The Exploring & Thinking Bursary Award supports individual professional artists to develop their artistic practice working with and/or producing work for early childhood arts, with a particular focus on marginalised children.

Bursary Awards

In 2025, one Bursary Award will be granted per local authority involved. This means there are a total of four Awards available.



Eligibility

One Bursary Award will be granted per local authority with a total of four Awards available. These Bursaries are open to:

- 1 individual professional artists who wish to develop their practice in early childhood arts
- 2 artists practicing in all artforms
- 3 artists making work with and/or for marginalised children
- 4 artists must be resident in or planning to deliver bursary funded work in one of the Dublin local authority administrative areas, or articulate how this bursary will impact one or more of the areas – Fingal, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown, Dublin City, South Dublin.

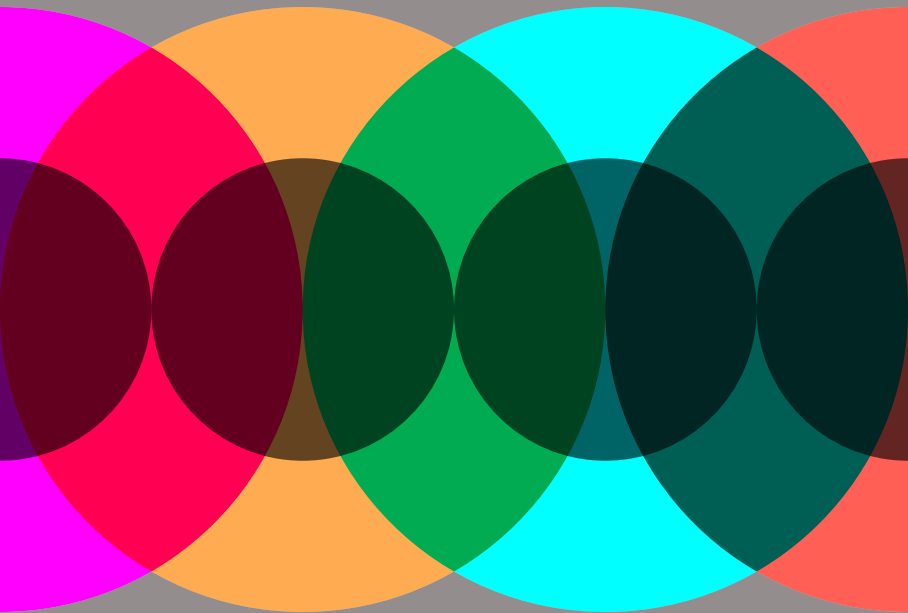
All successful bursaries need to be completed by year end 2026. We reserve the right not to allocate funding and to allocate partial funding. The fund is limited and all eligible applications will be evaluated on a competitive basis against the criteria set out in this document.

Key Dates

Open for applications 11.08.25

Deadline to enter 01.10.25

Applicants will be notified week of 20.10.25 – 24.10.25



Proposals

Proposals can include but are not limited to:

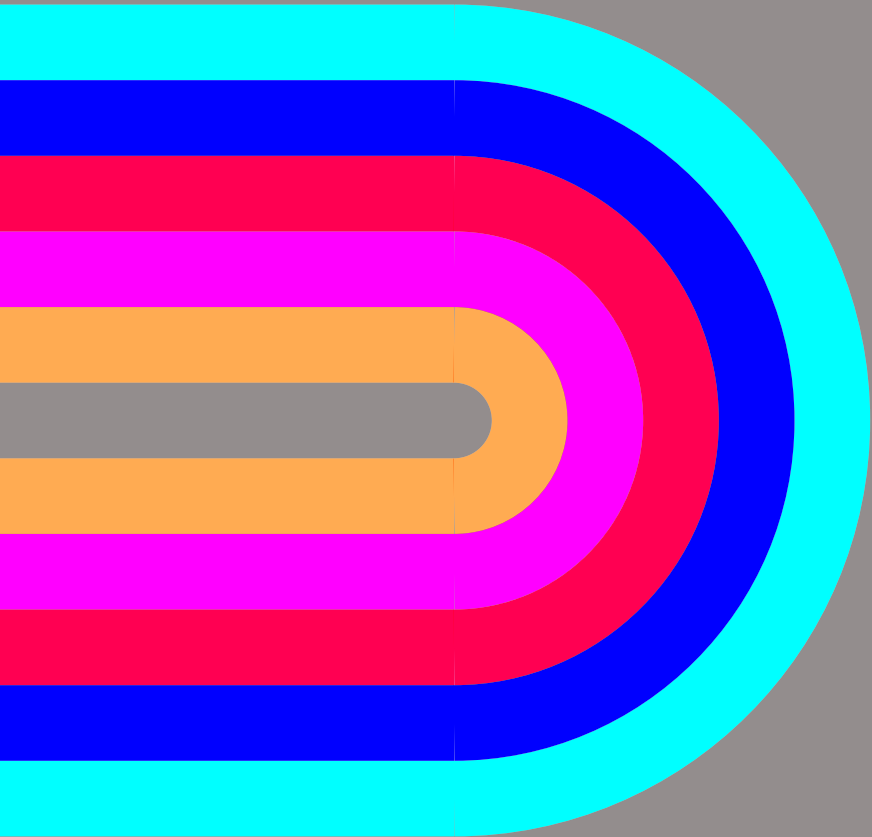
- 1 Professional development, including travel
- 2 Seed new ideas and partnerships
- 3 Access mentoring
- 4 Research and development of new work
- 5 Residencies

Timeline

- ↓ Call out
Week of 11 August 2025
- ↓ Closing date for queries
2pm – 24 September 2025
- ↓ Closing date for receipt of applications
2pm – 1 October 2025
<https://dlrcoco.submit.com/>
- ↓ Assessment period
Week of 6 October 2025
- ↓ Successful applicants notified
Week of 20 October 2025
- ↓ Bursary range for 2025
€4,000 – €5,000

Bursary Range

One Bursary Award will be granted per local authority. Bursary Range €4,000–€5,000.



Submissions

Electronic submissions via <https://dlrcoco.submit.com/>
Include the following:

- 1** Curriculum Vitae/s of lead artist and collaborators (if relevant)
- 2** A proposal in response to the bursary criteria, identifying the local authority area you are resident or working in. (max word count 1,500)
- 3** 3 examples of relevant artistic projects in support of proposal. One copy of supplementary information is sufficient per application. Accessible file types: .doc, .docx, .pdf, .gif, .jpg, .jpeg, .png, .svg, .tif, .tiff, .aac, .aiff, .flac, .m4a, .mp3, .ogg, .wav, .wma, .3gp, .avi, .flv, .m4v, .mkv, .mov, .mp4, .mpg, .webm, .wmv, .ppt, .xls, .xlsx, .zip
- 4** All documents of selected work must be clearly titled.
- 5** Links to moving image/film/sound recordings (the combined length of your film/ audio must not exceed 10 mins in length)
- 6** Budget Breakdown, outlining other income received if relevant
- 7** Timeline outlined
- 8** Official letters of support or acceptance are required with proposals for the following: Mentorship, Masterclasses, Collaborations, Residencies.

Late or incomplete applications will not be accepted.

Queries

Julie Clarke

Youth & Education Officer

Fingal County Arts Office

E: Julie.clarke@fingal.ie

T: 01 8905000

Máire Davey

Assistant Arts Officer

Participation and Learning

Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown

County Arts Office

E: mdavey@dlrcoco.ie

T: 01 2362756

Sinead Connolly

Assistant Arts Officer

Dublin City Arts Office

E: Sinead.connolly@dublincity.ie

T: 01 2225455

Orla Scannell

Arts Officer

Early Years, Children and Young People

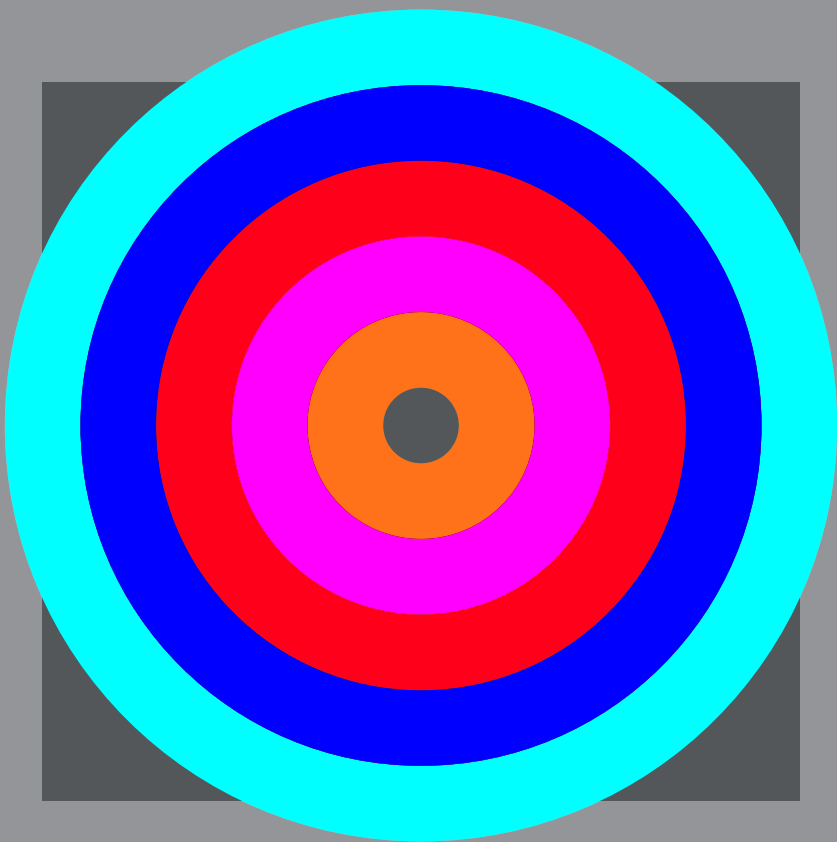
South Dublin County Arts Office

E: oscannell@sdublincoco.ie

T: 01 4149000

Applications

Applications should be submitted
via: <https://dlrcoco.submit.com/>



Notes

The Selection

Panel The Selection Panel whose decision is final will be composed from the following: Arts Professionals from the four Local Authorities and Early Childhood Arts Experts.

Freedom of Information

The provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2014 apply to all four Dublin Local Authorities. Applicants should state if any of the information supplied by them is confidential or sensitive and should not be disclosed in response to a request for information under the aforementioned Act. Applicants should state why they consider the information to be confidential or commercially sensitive. Submission from applicants will be kept for twelve months for the purpose of documenting the selection process and ensuring transparency of the selection process.

Garda Vetting and Child Protection

It is a legal requirement that all persons working with children, young people and vulnerable people, are subject to Garda Vetting. In accordance with national child protection policy, Children First National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children, award recipients working with early years children must have child protection policy, proper procedures and a child safeguarding statement in place.

Insurance

We reserve the right to seek confirmation of public liability.

Tax Clearance Certificate

We reserve the right to seek a Tax Clearance certificate.
