



October 2025

A review of Toi Ōtautahi, the city's arts and creativity strategy, will be initiated this October 2025. The strategy was last updated in conjunction with Creative New Zealand, Rātā Foundation, mana whenua, ChristchurchNZ and with additional funding support from Manatū Taonga. Toi Ōtautahi was drafted following extensive engagement with the arts sector and communities of Christchurch.

As we set out to re-engage with the sector and communities of Christchurch, we note that partners Creative New Zealand and ChristchurchNZ have extended ongoing support for an updated strategy. This support is non-financial.

The following sets out what has been achieved and what is left to do from the strategy endorsed by partners in August and September 2019. We offer some insights about what has evolved since 2019 including the impact of Covid-19 and subsequent financial constraints for the arts sector.

Implementation Progress – The Strategic Action Areas

Resource - through collaboration, strategy partners seek to support new ways of funding the arts, and to ensure transparency and clarity of processes for accessing funds and resources so that the arts and artists thrive.

What we said we would do:

1. Increase Investment

Covid-19 resulted in increased funding across the sector. Many organisations were able to secure funding for new and, on occasion, existing activities. The Council arts team were able to secure support to deliver a three-year programme through Manatū Taonga. Most Covid-19 funds across the country were closed out early in 2024.

Creative New Zealand (CNZ) reshaped their funding programme following broad sector engagement. In 2025 CNZ has initiated a review of their overarching strategy which may further impact how funding is distributed and managed. There is no data at this time to understand any change in distribution of CNZ funds to the city.

It was noted in 2022 and 2023 that investment in the city was quite low when compared to other cities on a per capita basis (excluding Creative Community Scheme funding), notably when compared to Wellington. This was likely due to a number of factors. It was also noted that the South Island has fewer assessors and currently has only two staff contributing to advice toward activities and decision making.

Christchurch City Council (Council) completed construction of a new theatre, now home to The Court Theatre, while construction continues at Parakiore and One NZ Stadium at Te Kaha where creative activity and programmes can be supported.

Council opened Toi Auaha, a community arts hub in the central city, late in 2022. The facility was formally leased for around 60 years by the YHA and now is home to some 20 artists' studios and a base for various arts and crafts groups. The house enables community arts workshops, meetings, workshops and artists run exhibition spaces.

In addition, Council made a significant commitment to fund The Arts Centre and Watch This Space through the 2024 long-term plan.

Rātā Foundation continues to support several arts organisations to deliver activities across the city.

2. Support and investment in creative education/Support capability building initiatives

Council's arts team devised and continue to offer a range of workshops supporting professional development of arts practices including copyright, contracts, marketing, ethics and sustainability. In addition, a number of masterclasses were offered across a variety of disciplines. The arts team worked to increase engagement with Council resources, supporting workshops at Tūranga including use of studio and music recording studios, sewing and 3D printing facilities.

Workshops and development projects were supported through funding of programmes offered through The Arts Centre, RDU and others.

The arts team look forward to continuing work in this area. Workshops are offered on the first Wednesday of the month through till the end of 2025 at this time.

3. Establish a range of exchange, residency and mentoring opportunities

Several mentoring programmes between 2022 and 2024 supported script writing for the screen, waiata i te reo Māori, song writing and music production, professional practice and more. These saw local creatives paired with experts from across New Zealand.

Community arts residencies were supported between 2022 and 2024, connecting artists with different community spaces and organisations across the city. In addition, a small number of artists were supported to create new work.

CNZ launched a new funding programme supporting fellowships and residencies in 2024. Two Christchurch organisations have been supported through this. A residency programme at the house designed and build for artist Bill Sutton was established supported by a trust, the University and Canterbury and Christchurch Art Gallery.

The Stoddart Cottage Trust reinvigorated the exhibition programme at the Diamond Harbour based house offering a residency programme with support from a local homeowner.

4. Commission a study to benchmark the value of the arts

ChristchurchNZ undertook analysis of the local creative sector late in 2023. The creative arts sector employed at least 5,690 people in Christchurch in 2022, 8.2% of the national creative sector. Since 2017, the size of Christchurch's creative arts workforce has grown more rapidly than the workforce overall (7.5% vs 7%), in contrast with national trends; larger than legal and accounting workforce combined (4,400), and similar to the number of people working in local and central government in Christchurch (5,500).

The local creative arts sector generated at least \$718 million in GDP output in 2022 and contributed 2.4% to Christchurch's total economic output, and 7.3% of national creative sector output.

The local design and digital media sub-sectors make a uniquely strong contribution to the national creative arts industry while the strongest economic development opportunities are in screen and digital media.

The city is home to the country's largest music festival, Electric Avenue, which is estimated to contribute \$6million to the local economy.

In 2023, the Council's arts team surveyed the local arts sector. 320 organisations responded. 65% hosted weekly classes, 78% of organisations believed there was scope to extend their offerings. Over half of respondents were performance-based, with membership fees and ticket sales being the primary sources of income for most organisations.

The majority of organisations reported that their key demographics were between 11 - 29 years old.

5. Other activity

Creation of the Toi Ōtautahi website, monthly newsletter and social media platforms, and the engagement of a contractor to oversee development and ongoing content creation. The website is well used, with a highly engaged audience and forms the basis for a monthly newsletter which has a growing reach and very high open rate. Social media platforms have growing followers with dynamic and engaging content. Anecdotal analysis

suggests these communications platforms are highly valued by our local arts sector in terms of promotion – which is not easily accessible to many creatives and artists.

An informal strategy review group drawn from the sector was convened to offer Council’s arts team insight, feedback, ideas and opportunities in delivery of the strategy.

The group was established with invited membership ensuring diversity of representation. Membership changed over time. Meetings were facilitated biannually initially then quarterly. Maintaining purpose and focus for the group was challenging, particularly as the relationship was between Council staff and community representatives, which narrowed the view of strategy implementation.

While bringing a mix of creatives, producers and governors together was of valuable, there is no clear rationale for continuing with a review group at this time.

6. Insights

Investment in the arts has increased from Council with significant development of facilities, access to equipment (notably through Council libraries), and funding.

Funding to support implementation of the strategy through partner organisations has not been assessed, though Rātā Foundation staff were consulting with arts advisors through 2020-2023, testing applications fit with the strategy.

Strategy funding partners have different imperatives and strategies which do not necessarily nor easily accommodate targeted support for delivery of the strategy across their various funding streams.

The participation survey is to be redeveloped to ensure more meaningful data is captured.

Create and Encounter - support opportunities to create and to experience the arts across a range of places and spaces so that a diversity of art forms and of cultures are visible, ideas can be tested and shared, and the city and region is activated.

What we said we would do:

1. Ensure access to affordable spaces to develop and present work

Across the Council network there are a range of hireable spaces, at community friendly rates across libraries, community centres and at Toi Auaha, in the central city and across the city including Banks Peninsula.

Larger spaces for presenting performance work in the central city include the Town Hall, Isaac Theatre Royal, The Piano, The Court Theatre, The Arts Centre, and Papa Hou at Kind Foundation, with opportunities at the Christchurch Art Gallery, and Ara Institute. Hire rates vary markedly with use of the Town Hall at the top end, while The Piano offers affordable access for a variety of music events.

Community workshops, presentations and seminars are well accommodated at larger spaces at Tūranga, where a range of meeting spaces can also be hired.

Funding partners continue to support independent public galleries including CoCA and The Physics Room, as well as support for community galleries in Linwood and Diamond Harbour. Museums based at Okains Bay, Akaroa and Lyttelton are owned, managed or supported through Council funds.

Toi Auaha provides affordable studio spaces and workshop/meeting spaces.

Council provides a range of spaces suitable for very small scale and larger events. Costs vary.

2. Increase opportunities to present a range of art forms

Support from partners has continued to enable presentation of music, dance and visual arts from a range of organisations and individuals.

Council increased support for a number of events through a new city partnership events fund. A small amount of this has provided targeted support for new events supporting local arts and cultural projects.

The arts team closely collaborate with Council's events production team on Summer Theatre and Sparks, two free to attend Council events. Involvement of local artists and support for development have been notable outcomes.

The arts team also leads design and delivery of Tīrama Mai, a celebration of Puanga-Matariki. As it has evolved, moving towards an arts rather than light festival, more artists are engaged to create original work for light installations, projections, sound and music and performances.

3. Collaboratively develop a public arts plan

A review of Council's Artworks in Public Places policy was initiated late in 2024 and is ongoing. Interviews with various stakeholders have taken place and a survey to hapū and rūnanga and wider arts sector is in development. Engagement will continue through till 2026, with a draft document expected to go to Council in the first half of the year.

Watch This Space, a street art organisation, is supported by Council to deliver its strategy for the city.

SCAPE Public Art continue to be supported through various funds and work with Council teams in relation to their event and various projects across the city.

It is anticipated that following the adoption of the new Artworks in Public Places policy, work can begin on shared promotion to celebrate the cities growing public art.

4. Insights

Post-quake, Ōtautahi became internationally known for its creative response to the disaster. While the transition period has ended, there is still possibility to capitalise on this reputation by telling a story that spans the entirety of the region's history; our public art now reflects tangata whenua and mana whenua in a way that is now significant nationally. The city is a canvas and a playground for artists and creatives across all mediums.

SCAPE and Watch This Space are unique organisations in the New Zealand context and provide a strong base for diverse artforms and communities to be represented. Mana whenua involvement in capital programmes ensures continued creation of work that celebrates iwi and hapū of the region and so unique stories to tell.

Christchurch is a public arts powerhouse and there is opportunity to capitalise on this. Improving communication between organisations, ensuring transparency, certainty of funding, ensuring diverse stories are told, and strengthening mana whenua engagement are all key for continued meaningful growth.

Inclusion – increase opportunities to initiate, lead, and to participate in the arts, and support a range of wellbeing programmes so that our communities are connected and resilient.

What we said we would do:

1. Ensure opportunities for celebrating difference and diversity

Partners continue to fund a range of organisations to share important cultural events across the city.

Council supported the opening of a multi-cultural facility in Hagley Park which supports a broad range of cultural groups and events.

2. Advance arts and health programmes

Partners continue to support a range of organisations enabling broad participation in the arts and creativity. Organisations such as Jolt Dance, Ōtautahi Creative Spaces, Cantabrainers, The Muse and Skillwise ensure access and learning and development opportunities across our communities.

The arts team support and participate in the national and local Te Ora Auaha (arts and wellbeing) network.

3. Ensure opportunities for children and youth in the arts

Partners support a range of organisations delivering a broad range of programmes targeted at young people, schools and communities, including the Christchurch Symphony Orchestra, New Zealand Opera, The Muse,

Cubbin Theatre, The Court Theatre, Te Whare Tapere, Woolston Brass, SCAPE, Christchurch School of Music, Muse, and Whakaraupō Carving Centre.

There is no dedicated non-commercial children's artmaking space in the city (commercial opportunities do exist including dance, music and visual arts) though there are a range of youth hubs offering creative programmes and spaces, and various children and youth programmes are delivered at various community organisations.

4. Ensure opportunities for life-long learning

Partners continue to support a range of organisations offering weekly classes, workshops and masterclasses including The Muse, Woolston Brass, choirs, local operatic companies and others.

The arts team hope to continue to offer workshops over the coming years, and where funding allows, mentoring opportunities.

5. Celebrate our heritage, arts leadership and connections with the Pacific

Council's Heritage Festival enables diverse communities to showcase their place in our city.

The arts team participation in national networks, RANA and Te Ora Auaha keeps us connected to a range of organisations delivering strategies, events and activities across the motu. Council and community organisations continue to connect and develop projects through the Christchurch Arts Audience Development trust.

Pacific Underground founders have made a return to the city, contributing to events. In the visual arts and education space Tagata Moana Trust via Fibre is supporting a range of programmes to take place.

6. Insights

The need to ensure inclusive programming and funding is unlikely to diminish. Demand is likely to grow as the city and region grows and the population becomes more diverse.

This 'catch-all' action needs to be revisited, separating out aspirations, with some firmer targets for supporting arts leadership and pacific arts specifically.

Ngā Toi Māori – cultivate opportunities for ngā toi Māori to develop and be presented so that Māori culture is visible and celebrated in the community.

What we said we would do:

1. Support Māori artists to initiate projects which enable development of their arts practice

Partners continue to fund artists or projects which enable participation and development of individual practitioner and collectives.

Through Toi Auaha, Council supports space for Māori artists. The initial period of use was primarily aimed at supporting artists establishing Te Whare Tapere, a new space at The Arts Centre for Māori arts and artists.

Christchurch Art Gallery employed a Pouarataki Māori curator which has driven an increase in ngā toi Māori and special events.

2. Ensure greater access to all forms of Māori arts for audience, students, and makers

Partners continue to prioritise funding for Māori arts and artmakers or for organisations committed to targeted programmes and investment.

Mana whenua stories have been and continue to be embedded in capital building projects including libraries and recreation and sports centres, included in naming and artwork and design commissions.

Through Council's largest event, Tīrama Mai, a celebration of Puanga-Matariki, visual artists, designers, musicians, performers and storytellers are engaged to create work that gives expression to the values of Matariki and which bring a Ngāi Tahu narrative to life. Māori artists are primarily engaged, though may work in teams with a diversity of cultural backgrounds represented. In addition, local tech crews and fabricators are great supporters and creatives within the event. Between 70,000 and 120,000 have attend annually.

The event is supported with cultural advice from hapū and iwi representatives. The event has transitioned from being a simple light festival.

3. Strengthen and grow partnerships, networks and opportunities

Several ringatoi Māori hui have been held at Toi Auaha since 2022, all hosted by external parties and all connecting local creatives to national organisations and artists.

Through Tīrama Mai the arts team are connecting creatives and cultural experts across the city with each other. The emphasis in the coming years will be to grow collaborative projects which see artists strengthen their relationships with cultural advisors and so their knowledge and practice.

4. Insights

Investment beyond \$2000 through Council, unlike CNZ, supports formally structured organisations, trusts and incorporated societies, rather than individual artists or informal collectives. This has narrowed opportunities to invest and support worthwhile artists projects. Similarly, Rātā Foundation only supports registered charitable organisations. This is a potential barrier and needs some exploration. It is noted that there are only a handful of organisations with charitable status with a specific purpose and focus on ngā toi Māori.

Connection – improve promotion of the arts and ensure opportunities to explore a diversity of artforms

1. Ensure the treaty relationship is honoured and understood

Partners fund events, activities, programmes and organisations delivering diverse programmes with specific commitments to ngā toi Māori, supporting transition of traditional knowledge, contemporary arts and crafts, as well as reo Māori based projects.

CNZ is in the process of updating its Māori arts strategy, Toi Ora 2025-2030 and it's overarching strategy including a commitment to the Treaty relationship.

2. Improve existing communication and information sharing platforms

A 'virtual arts office' for Christchurch was mooted as the country moved into Covid-19 restrictions as a way to keep the arts sector and community connected. The Toi Ōtautahi website launched in 2022. A specialist communications contractor worked with Studio Publica to create the platform and continues to assist us in creating and commissioning content. The website stands separate to Council platforms and enables independent use of social media platforms Facebook and Instagram (2300+ followers).

The arts team are currently expanding the website to include a dedicated page for Toi Auaha. A monthly newsletter has over 1000 subscribers and is growing subscribers by around 10 sign-ups a week, and a very high open rate. The contracted specialist remains part of the delivery team.

3. Collaboratively develop a strategy to promote the arts and creative activity

The arts team participates in and supports the Christchurch Arts Audience Development trust (CAAD) alongside local agencies. This group devised and supported Year of the Arts facilitated through the arts team.

CAAD is evolving and shifting focus towards more outward looking promotion and growing participation. The group will continue to use Toi Ōtautahi platforms to share news and information.

4. Increase opportunities for gathering

Partners have supported the Arts Foundation Boost Ōtautahi programme over several years facilitating large gatherings and networking opportunities.

CNZ hosts gatherings aligned with release of key publications and strategy developments, while also collaborating with the Arts Foundation on All in for Art across the country, including in Christchurch.

With the opening of Toi Auaha, the arts team have been able to host or facilitate space for a variety of hui, workshops and informal gatherings. Toi Auaha is used by various groups to host hui or run regular workshops. Artists have used the house for workshops and to develop projects.

5. Insights

Development of a new communication strategy for Toi Ōtautahi digital communication platforms will be initiated following the review of the Toi Ōtautahi strategy.

The opening of Te Whare Tapere at The Arts Centre created new opportunities within the Māori arts community, while Fibre created space for some pacific artists to collaborate and create work.

There is opportunity to grow use of Toi Auaha across the community. Workshops improving understanding of Te Tiriti o Waitangi for the arts sector could be considered.