

Strategic Plan 2023-2027



First published: September 2023

Next review: October 2025

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Forward

We are delighted to present our ambitious Strategic Plan which covers the 5-year period 2023 through 2028. We've set a high 'bar' – in terms of content and accessibility. This plan will ensure our work is truly inclusive & will help to secure the future of a vibrant & relevant film culture across Ireland.

The distinctive feature of access>CINEMA is *enriching people's lives* through supporting and facilitating the provision of diverse, high-quality cinematic experiences. Art, in its many forms (including cinema) has the power to enhance and change lives. Cinema is one of the the most accessible art forms – often not as intimidating, exclusive or expensive as other art forms. It should not be confined to those who can afford or easily access this.

There's a powerful secondary benefit. Shared cinematic experience are very different to 'seeing' a film at home as they offer many additional community benefits. Arguably, the actual film being screened is less important than the social interaction, particularly in rural & isolated communities.

We would like to thank our Board members and our external stakeholders for their generous support in terms of time investment to help construct this innovative plan.

The Arts Council have shown a particular interest and belief in the importance of our Mission. In particular, we would like to acknowledge Fionnuala Sweeney for her ongoing support. As we go forward we will strenghten this key partnership which is centrally important to the ongoing functioning of our organisation.

The insights provided have been invaluable. It's up to the access CINEMA team now to make it happen. We are fully committed to delivering on the actions listed and reporting our progress as we go forward.

Jennifer Connolly
Chairperson

Maeve Cooke
Chief Executive

Our Mission

Our Mission: Ensure that everyone in Ireland can access diverse and inspirational cinema experiences to enrich their lives.

Who We Are: access>CINEMA is a not-for-profit arts and culture provider. For 40+ years, we've brought Irish and International cinema to a wide range of regional communities. It's a unique offering; no similar organisation or service exists in Ireland.

Our Network: We deliver on this mission via our established network of non-specialist film venues, which includes members across all 26 counties (September 2023: Connaught 12, Munster 28, Leinster 32, Ulster 8), providing a geographical reach that is essential for the Irish cinema infrastructure.

Target Audience: Not everyone can access high-quality cinema experiences. Poverty, geographical location (isolated & rural communities) and disability block this. We overcome these barriers and reach audiences – across a variety of locations and in almost every county in Ireland. Pre-pandemic our audience was circa 80,000+ people annually; currently our audience is in a state of strong recovery, sitting at just over 60,000 . During the lifetime of this plan we hope to double this number.

Blocked Access: While it may outwardly seem that everyone in Ireland can go to the cinema, this ignores three *hidden barriers* (a) At lower socio-economic levels, going to the cinema is a luxury not everyone can afford (b) A cohort of people present with a range of disabilities (hearing, sight, mobility, Autism and so on) who cannot access cinema (c) Cinema experiences are typically a 'diet' of mono-cultural storylines and outcomes – resulting in a narrow, unidimensional view of the world. Through our work, we address each of these barriers.

Core Service: We deliver film programming advice & audience development support for cultural cinema exhibition on a year-round basis. We curate film programmes that reveal cinema as an exciting & inspiring artform which members' audiences can explore. Our work is driven by the needs of our members and we continuously adapt to remain relevant and responsive.

Our Values

Community: We are an interdependant learning community focused on continuous improvement. Cinema is the glue that binds us together. We share experiences, expertise and resources in a collaborative endeavour. Within our broader community we recognise and support discrete audiences, e.g. people who speak other native languages (Portuguese, Ukranian) and people with disabilities.

Innovation: Technical innovations in distribution and delivery of cinema offerings are an ongoing feature of this industry. We keep abreast of changing technologies and keep members 'up to date' on emerging trends and technical innovations. Through continuous innovation, we make it easier for our members to present and for their audiences to access high-quality cinematic experiences.

Inclusion: We are committed to working towards removing barriers, including racial, disability & socio-economic, so that all citizens have the opportunity to engage equally with cinema.

Curation: Cinema powerfully combines learning and engagement in a single offering. Cultural cinema offers diverse perspectives (Irish and International) which are engaging and insightful. We curate the best 'non-mainstream' cinema and deliver a buffet of cinematic experiences. To provide this service, we stay up-to-date on changing cinematic trends and changing requirements within our own community.

Networking: Our organisation can only function with the goodwill and support of a range of organisations and individuals across the world of arts and cinema. In providing cinematic material or funding our work directly, our network partners are our lifeblood. We simply cannot exist without this powerful network and work diligently to secure and expand this.

Positiveness: Our aim point is to be '*easy to do business with.*' Low bureaucracy. Quick responses. Friendly, at every touch point. We try to add-value in everything we do, making life 'easier' for our partners and richer for end users.



Strategic Goal #1: Provide Cinema Access for Everyone

Goal: Audiences are at the core of all of access>CINEMA activities. Our goal is to enable equal access for everyone to engage with a greater range of cinema options.

Actions

Audience Recovery: We are strongly focused on supporting members in getting audiences back to their local screenings. This provides an opportunity not just to return existing audiences to previous levels, but also to identify and grow new cinema audiences

Technical Excellence: Champion a positive viewing experience for cinema screenings/events by ensuring audiences encounter the best possible technical, collective scenario at access>CINEMA sites. Technical 'audits' of all existing sites are conducted and remedial plans developed in conjunction with local leaders.

Ask the Customers: Develop systematic ease-of-data-collection method for our members to 'ask' customers about their immediate cinema experience and what they would like to see in the future. We both learn from what we do and build an appetite for future offerings.

Focus on Accessibility: Pilot an accessibility film programme during 2023 @ a minimum of 10 sites. Aimed at including audiences with visual impairment, hearing disabilities, dementia-friendly and sensory screening needs. We will 'target' organisations which work with these cohorts of people and develop marketing materials to better communicate our offerings.

Marketing Plan: Establish a dedicated audience development function internally with responsibility for identifying, developing and growing new audiences in existing sites. There are twin elements to this (a) how access>CINEMA markets our services to clients and how our partner organisations (in turn) market the offerings to end users. We will work with a 3rd level educational institution (Post-Graduate Marketing Students) to develop this plan. The plan will include the best use of social medial channels and generating audiences for more challenging material¹

Increase Usage: Complete a diagnostic project with 5 'underperforming' existing partners (sites with below average attendances for film), and work closely with them to understand potential 'blockages' to attendance.

Organisation Reach: Continued emphasis on including audiences in rural and/or isolated communities by (a) Securing new venues/sites for cinema offerings (b) extending our reach into the 4 counties not currently served by access>CINEMA to deliver an all-island reach (c) review our pricing model to ensure (as far as is practicable) that costs are not a barrier to usage (4) Organising meetings/events at a time that's most suitable to the membership.

¹ Material which entails one or more of the following features: over 2 hours running time; thematically considered less audience friendly e.g. stories featuring death and/or suicide; structurally considered less audience friendly e.g. experimental or non-linear narrative; having no media profile; not in the English language; documentary.

New Audiences: We will target more young Irish adults (18-30) and make them feel welcomed/ connected. The strong intent here is to encourage greater engagement with cultural cinema from that particular cohort than currently exists. Focusing on this group will deliver a sustainable model for diverse cinema in cultural venues and encourage crossover for other artforms.

Success Measures

1. Construct a proactive Marketing and communications plan by Q4 2025.
2. Develop a simple system to measure/record attendance numbers.
3. Double the number of participants from circa 60,000 (end of 2022) to 120,000 people by 2028.
4. Increase the number of locations offering diverse cinema programmes in partnership with access>CINEMA from 80 to 100+.
5. Diversity in the audience make-up at access>CINEMA sites.

Strategic Goal #2: Widen & Strengthen our Distribution Network

Goal: Our network (film societies, arts centres and community cinemas) had grown significantly in the 10 years pre-pandemic. We want to consolidate this growth and strengthen the benefits for those engaging with our services.

Actions

Membership Structure: Redefine the membership structure with the benefits of each level of membership and participation in access>CINEMA member events clearly outlined. As part of this we will incentivise higher-usage.

On-Line Resources: Develop a complete set of online resources and support guides available on the access>CINEMA website (covering topics including licensing, programming, technical considerations, marketing and accessibility). The goal here is to ensure that partner organisations in the community can increase self-sufficiency in marketing efforts.

Learning Networks: Use technological developments (e.g. WhatsApp groups) to facilitate formal peer-to-peer learning, information sharing and debate between members. During the 1st half of this plan we will develop a 'community of practices' – driven by 6 events annually where information/trends are demonstrated and shared.

Technical Excellence: We want to embrace industry technological developments and, where feasible, make these available to local operators. Example: Supply films to non-DCP (Digital Cinema Package) sites via digital methods instead of DVD/Blu-ray discs. We will trial the feasibility of DCP-kit rental with a view to encouraging larger non-DCP sites to upgrade.

Active Networks: Provide increased opportunities for connecting access>CINEMA exhibitors and their audiences with Irish filmmaking talent and other industry professionals through Q&As, member-only screenings and inviting 'high-profile' guests from the world of cinema.

Assessing Today: Before we develop a range of new services, we need to know which current services are most highly valued. By end of 2023 we will analyse the relative ranking of current services (film booking: programming advice: events: technical support: marketing materials etc.). We also need to better understand 'who needs what' i.e. how expectations from film societies differ from Arts Centres.

Seamless Processes: We will ensure that access>CINEMA is 'easy to do business with' by streamlining our internal processes e.g. Rights Clearance, timely invoicing. Some clients have

expressed dissatisfaction with delays in invoicing (it can impact their cash flows) and this will be on an immediate 'fix' list².

Success Measures

1. Increased engagement with access>CINEMA events including programming meetings and preview screening opportunities. Annually, we will target to run a minimum of 6 events.
2. Increased collaborations between members of access>CINEMA through the learning networks. This will increase resource sharing and peer-to-peer learning amongst members (networks will be established on a geographical basis for ease of access).
3. A well-defined cinema community, with significantly improved engagement between access>CINEMA exhibitors, audiences and Irish film-makers at 50 showcase events per year by 2028.
4. The number of access>CINEMA sites will increase from 80 (2023) to 100 (2028)

² Note: For access>CINEMA to invoice quickly, our partners need to send us box office information post screening in a timely manner; we will work with them to resolve this issue.

Strategic Goal #3: Offer a Diverse Range of Cinema Experiences

Goal: Continue to act as an advocate for independent cinema by curating and delivering film programmes recognised for quality, diversity and ambition.

Actions

Wider Choices: The Irish film exhibition landscape has become increasingly competitive and polarised, with commercial content and key distributors dominating the market. We are not in 'competition' with mainstream cinema; we will offer alternative films for consumption.

Inclusive Programmes: Conduct an annual review of programming policy to ensure we cater for diverse content and appeal to demographics currently underrepresented in Irish cinema, e.g. different nationalities, people with disabilities, LGBT+ audiences and so on.

Youth Programme: Establish a Youth Programmer Group tasked with curating films aimed at 18-30 year olds. The central objective here is to engage this group in cinema as a cultural experience and nurture future audiences for cultural cinema.

Programme Duration: In 2024, we will establish a pilot for a minimum of 5% of sites to programme on a shorter-term basis. Most members programme in 3-4 month blocks. In practice, it can be difficult to get guaranteed answers far in advance on what will be available 4-5 months down the line. The model also loses the benefit from the 'word of mouth' marketing around a film after its release (i.e. it can make their film programme seem 'stale'). If sites were to programme in 2 month blocks, we believe that, while there is more work involved all round, this would help considerably in attracting new audiences.

Cultural Partnerships: Strengthen and develop long-term relationships with appropriate cultural partners e.g. Irish filmmakers/artists, with a view to providing increased engagement at cinema screenings and additional touring opportunities across access>CINEMA sites.

Irish Language: Construct a 5-year plan that develops new audiences for Irish language feature content, whilst also growing audiences for a range of cinema in Gaeltacht areas.

Declining Offers: Develop a stronger ability to prioritise applications for support - focusing on requests that 'align' with our core mission (and, saying no to stuff that falls outside this).

Advance Screenings: Facilitate Peer Network advance screenings to determine suitability for local audiences.

Film Festivals and Guests: We will also align more events around Irish Festivals, e.g. screening day during DIFF, programming meeting in Cork during Cork International Film Festival. To provide a stronger sense of occasion, selected 'guest speakers' will add value at access>CINEMA screenings

(providing insight into the film, how it was made, their role, background to the core story of the film etc.).

Success Measures

1. The numbers of screenings held across our sites will increase from 1,550 (end of 2022) to 2,000.
2. Number of sites with a defined monthly programme will increase from 0 to 10.
3. The diversity of films will increase from 320 (end of 2022) to 500.
4. The number of sites hosting guest speakers will double between 2024 and 2026.
5. Number of Irish films shown will increase by 10% (year on year), with the number of people seeing Irish films growing from circa 13,000 (2022) to 21,000 by end of 2027.

Strategic Goal #4: Develop a Distinctive Brand with Clear Offerings

Goal: Despite our 40+ years track-record in cultural cinema exhibition, activities have largely happened ‘behind-the-scenes.’ As a consequence, it’s difficult to explain ‘what we do.’ We now wish to strengthen our profile and become recognised as an established brand with the public and across the industry.

Actions

Organisation Rebrand: Rebrand the organisation to reflect this new stage in access>CINEMA’s development. We need to capture the passion, vibrancy and ambition of our Mission to invigorate both existing and potential new members, audiences and stakeholders. As part of the rebranding effort, we will critique our existing Logo to ensure that it powerfully communicates our mission.

Public Relations: We will sharpen our core proposition and develop a marketing/public relations strategy focused on the message of the access>CINEMA ‘community’ that incorporates members, audiences and filmmakers.

Annual Access: Hold an annual access>CINEMA Day of screenings (similar to Culture Night model) aimed at increasing public awareness of the network and acting as a membership driver to help develop new audiences and network members.

Showcase Irish Talent: Develop a series of activities aimed at strengthening engagement with both established and emerging Irish talent. This will help to contextualise a central role in disseminating Irish work through our network.

Improved Networking: Ensure that internal staff and Board Members avail of networking opportunities by being present at key domestic and international industry events.

Media Presence: We will seek media opportunities (TV, Print, Radio) to ‘sell our message’ in a proactive way. One person on the Board/Internal organisation will be identified as the ‘face’ of access>CINEMA. We have an ambition to become a ‘thought leader’ in the space of how access to cinema can enhance and enrich people’s lives.

Website Development: Improve links with our members and the profiles of their film programmes through a redesigned website, which will automatically find and pull through film listings from members’ websites, and allow the public to search for and locate screenings of films screening across our network. Improve information on cultural cinema film programming and audience development via a centralised resource area on access CINEMA’s website, available to both existing members and those interested in developing new cinema activity in their local community.

New Releases: While there is always an appetite for new films, there is huge potential in our 'back-catalogue' of offering and rep-programming, which we will integrate into our viewing programmes.

Success Measures

1. Increased awareness with public and industry alike of access>CINEMA and the work it does as a distinctive provider of cinematic and cultural experiences.
2. Marketing and public relations strategy in place by Q4 2025. Reviewed annually.
3. By end of 2024 access>CINEMA screenings will be listed centrally with a location search facility on its redesigned website. We will explore opportunities for access>CINEMA screenings to be listed on other appropriate online portals.
4. 90% of members will be branded as 'access>CINEMA sites' by end of 2025.
5. Target 20+ media opportunities (TV, Print, Radio) annually to 'keep our name in lights.'
6. 2027 will mark the 50th anniversary of the organisation, a key milestone. Details on how we will celebrate this will emerge during the lifetime of this strategic plan.

Strategic Goal #5: Build a Powerful Organisation to Support our Ambition

Goal: access>CINEMA is a thriving charitable organisation, prudently managed and financially stable. We want to ensure long-term sustainability by enhancing the organisation capacity to deliver our ambitious strategy.

Actions

Performance Management: Develop a clear, easily understood set of annual objectives – with both day-to-day performance expectations and strategic initiatives measured and monitored.

Staff Development: In Q3 2024, we will conduct a 'skills' and internal ambition assessment to ensure our team have both the skills and motivation to successfully run the organisation.

Improved Funding: A key goal is to diversify our funding model so that we are not solely dependent on any single source of income. A strategy on diverse funding will be constructed during 2025 and presented to the Board for approval.

Hire Fundraiser: Recruit a new fundraiser/development manager. This person will have responsibility for identifying, developing and growing new relationships and income streams from a variety of sources including other public funding agencies, philanthropic sources and sponsorships.

Arts Council: Further develop the core relationship with the Arts Council – not simply as a vehicle for funding – but to tap into the wider issue of promoting access through Arts. A plan to do this will be constructed during the lifetime of this strategy.

Governance Routines: The CEO and the internal team are responsible for the day to day running of the organisation and for driving the 'strategic plan' elements forward. The Board provides oversight - meeting 6 times annually to (a) review the strategy and progress being made to deliver this (b) assess the performance of the organisation and the senior team (c) provide insights into the changing world of Cinema (d) ensure succession plans are in place for both the Board and the Executive. This combination of 'top-down' oversight and 'bottom-up' executive tracking (e.g. monthly financial accounts/reviewed by the leadership team) will ensure we stay fully on plan.

Membership Categories: Restructure and streamline the current membership model and associated fees to better reflect and consolidate the levels of services enjoyed by clients.

Non-Members: Provide an online 'film booking only' service available to non-members at a higher price point to improve our income stream.

Friends Programme: Establish and create awareness of a new Friends Programme targeting the cultural cinema community (which will include our existing members, cinema audiences and those working in the Irish cinema and arts industries).

EDI: Conduct an annual anonymous satisfaction survey of staff and board members, with results to be analysed, shared and discussed at staff and Board meetings, and then used to define further actions relating to staff and board development and organisational culture. Review and modify current recruitment processes for both staff and board, with a view to attracting a more diverse pool of future applicants.

Success Measures

1. Fundraiser and development Plan in place by Q2 2026.
2. €1M annual income by end 2026, of which circa 50% will come from Irish government agencies, with the remainder coming from sponsorship and/or philanthropic sources.
3. New membership model and fees in place by end 2025.
4. Friends Programme launched Q1 2024.
5. During the lifetime of this plan, the diversity of people employed by access CINEMA and appointed to our board will better reflect the increased diversity of the Irish population and the number of people who consider themselves having accessibility needs, as based on the 2022 Census data.