

# Equality, Diversity and Inclusion at CIFF

Toolkits to implementation

**Prepared by Blue Line Consulting, May 2024**

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## Introduction

At Cork International Film Festival (CIFF) we are committed to supporting equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in all aspects of our activity, employment, and operations. We want to use our platform as a world class festival to showcase our diverse and wide range of lived experiences, voices and perspectives, and ensure that everyone we work with, support, and welcome to the festival can enjoy the same opportunities.

We are committed to fostering an environment both internally and externally that promotes and respects EDI at work and to treating all of our employees, directors, volunteers, stakeholders, artists, and the public equally, regardless of age, civil status, disability, family status, gender and/or gender identity, religious belief, sexual orientation, race and/or ethnicity, membership of the Traveller community, or socio-economic background.

As well as working to become a more equitable, diverse, and inclusive organisation, we are committed to playing an active part in building a more equitable society.

CIFF's Diversity & Inclusion Policy was adopted in March 2023, catalysing our work towards making the festival more inclusive and accessible. Working with a group of people from communities that often experience barriers to participation and access, we learned a lot through their experiences of accessing information, booking, and attending the festival and other events and venues.

Our objectives as part of the implementation of our EDI Policy and Strategy include:

- fostering an equitable and inclusive professional environment for all staff
- ensuring EDI and intersectionality is considered as part of festival selection criteria and programming so that our programme is reflective of the diversity of society
- ensuring a welcoming and accessible experience for all festival visitors and audience members from all backgrounds and lived experiences
- advocating with our partners and suppliers to ensure they support and share our values.

We believe that our biggest impact lies in the opportunity to educate cinema goers, stimulating discussion and shining a light on the issues and solutions of climate and social issues, by carefully curating our film programme and outreach activities, and making those events accessible to as wide an audience as possible.

## Being an inclusive organisation

Barriers to inclusion and feeling welcome exist everywhere whether visible or not, in the design of spaces, programmes, or processes, in the language used, or in information that is missing. Individuals are all made up of multiple identities,

experiences, abilities and communities. They can feel excluded because of any, or many, of them.

If we create solutions by partnering with barely reached communities, we create a pathway to a world that is more accessible and equitable for everyone. Harnessing diversity provides unparalleled opportunity for creative collaboration, innovation and learning. Promoting equality, human rights and diversity in the arts in Ireland, we can benefit from rich artistic outcomes and contemporary practice that is challenging, relevant and more accurately reflective of our society today.

EDI at CIFF is an all-team endeavour – with each department and function ensuring that their processes for work, their policies, and the decisions made are purposeful and lead with accessibility and inclusion in mind, for us and our stakeholders.

Our approach is to lead with and lean into the opportunity to tell minority, under-represented, and untold stories through our programming, and ensure that this is met with communications, outreach, and education programmes that thoughtfully and purposefully reach out to communities that may be enriched by experiencing those stories. Those communities may need to be engaged with where they are, or they may need extra supports to travel or experience the film or wider festival equally.

We will work harder to diversify the Board and executive to ensure that the people in the room designing our programmes, policies, and processes, have lived experience enough to see how people may be excluded by the decisions we make, the times we choose to run our events, the language we use, the places we select to host our events, the people we choose to represent the stories through panel discussions or other contextualising events, and the partners we engage with.

This document presents recommendations to further activate our ambitions within EDI. Our overarching priorities are to:

- Mine deeper for artists, stories, team, Board members, and barely-reached communities – look to the multiply-marginalised for their point of view too
- Prioritise accessible booking, application and meeting processes, and working practices
- Consider how people can get to us, if they can get in the doors we use, and will they feel safe within, considering seating, bathroom access, and the accessibility of the content
- Have more conversations and ask even the uncomfortable questions. Ensure we don't just listen to the voices that confirm our unconscious bias - many communities have very divergent voices.

## Framework for implementing our EDI policy

The framework for implementing the EDI policy features an ongoing cycle of

- developing and promoting awareness of issues, challenges, and barriers,

- advocating for change for those excluded, or for resources to address the need,
- developing policy to address the exclusion or barrier,
- embedding that knowing and new behaviour into our company culture,
- creating systems and sharing them with others,
- evaluating the activity and making changes if needed,
- then socialising the success or otherwise and scanning the horizon for evolving access or inclusion challenges, as the framework is a continuous cycle.



## Recommendations and commitments

### Understanding privilege and the ongoing learning journey

We acknowledge that we don't know what we don't know, and that barriers to inclusion often exist in plain sight. We will always be mindful of and purposeful in the opportunities to learn, to understand our own privilege. Empathy, listening, and advocating will be our greatest tools.

#### *Recommendations*

- Benchmarking and keeping a watching brief on the diversity or otherwise of the groups we work with, the people attending programmes, etc, being mindful that our invitations may need to be more explicit to specific communities, our programming more relevant, or in some instances we may need to go to the places or spaces where they are having their needs met to connect most effectively and build a trusted relationship.
- Build, create, and design inclusion and diversity solutions with communities, not for communities – they are the experts in their own lived experience.

- Every two years we will convene a group of individuals from multiply-marginalised communities and invite them to attend the festival and feedback on the positive and negative experiences.

## Information as a pathway to access

“Venues and festivals will purport to be ‘fully accessible’ and I always want to know what does that mean? Fully accessible for whom? You need to tell me how you are accessible. And then I want to see it when I arrive at a space. I want to see it and I want to see it easily. Because, when you say it’s fully accessible, there’s always a caveat. It’s ‘fully accessible’, but there’s a small step into the front door; it’s ‘fully accessible’, but we might not have an accessible toilet or captions might not be available for somebody with an auditory processing disorder.”

*Comment from a participant in our Community Feedback Workshop, December 2023*

We know that ‘fully accessible’ is a very high bar as a festival reliant on the venues of others to host and platform our work and events, and with limited cinema screens available to us in Cork. We will provide information on access as a baseline, rather than something which those who are already marginalised have to ask about. Too often, Disabled people have to undertake more emotional and physical labour than others merely to be present.

If disabled and other marginalised people see from our website and other platforms of communication that we are intentional in how we present information, along with the breadth of details we give, we have already signalled our wish to include them. Including also an open invitation to contact us to let us know their accommodation needs, is an implicit indication that we have thought about them and are ready to include them in what we do.

### *Recommendations*

- To be clear in our communications about the access features available, and where limitations exist in venues. This will involve open and honest dialogue with venues and other partners, with an expressed need for them to be vigilant for changes, slips, and improvements, both during and in the lead up to festival.
- To always aim to use positive language, the language of the rights and justice movements, avoiding euphemisms which can be harmful or unclear. However, if an individual staff, artist, or audience member indicates a preference for how they would like to be referred, we will aim to respect that wish.
- Where we become aware of access issues in the digital platforms we use, such as for submitting films for consideration, we will signal the limitation, and offer alternatives where possible to those who are unable to participate because of the barrier, while advocating with suppliers and partners to create a fix for the issue.

## Multi-modal engagement

Our key learning to date has been that in engaging audience members as individuals, we cannot apply a policy of one-size-fits-all. We are designing a diversity of ways to engage and be involved, in the hope of reaching as many as possible. We cannot design one process, programme, or service that is accessible to or engages all people – we will design and plan a diversity of ways to participate so that everyone has the invitation and opportunity to develop a sense of welcome and belonging.

### *Recommendations*

- In our programming, strive to maintain an online programme of some kind alongside our in-person screenings, acknowledging that not everyone is comfortable or able to be in the room for the shared experience.
- To offer different kinds of screenings (some with just an introduction, others with a talk, panel or Q&A after), in different types of venues, and at a range of times of day, to suit a wider group of people and communities.
- To engage purposefully with film distributors and makers to have options to host audio-described and captioned screenings, screenings with visual descriptions, etc, especially for Intinn and other programming likely to bring more diverse audiences.
- Provide multiple different ways of reaching the Festival for queries, booking methods, applications. This may be as simple as providing a phone number as well as an email address at the end of a webpage, or as broad as providing multiple options for people to apply for or respond to job and other opportunities, such as written, audio file, video, etc.
- Ensure that booking for screenings and events is always available online, in person, on the phone, and with options for cash and digital payment.

“I also think that there are some people who can't access online and I work very much with the older population and quite a lot of them wouldn't have access to that. They also wouldn't have the ability or the mobility to be going into town or to offices or whatever. So I think it would be a good idea if there was a specific person and their role was just that people could call and they could talk them through what is available and why.”

*Comment from a participant in our Community Feedback Workshop, December 2023*

## Making CIFF a welcoming space

A significant reason why organisations are prone to unconscious bias in their cultural and institutional systems, processes, and thinking, is because of lack of diversity in the executive and/or the Board. More diversity and representation of different kinds of identities will begin to challenge group think by bringing new perspectives in planning and implementing more inclusive and accessible practices in our online spaces, recruitment, programming, outreach and education, employment, communications, signage, training, and our consideration of bathrooms, quiet spaces, seating, and entrances, etc.

We will approach inclusion and access creatively and with generosity and openness, through invitation, dialogue, and solutions. We have set our ambitions higher, and will strive to do better. Alongside the recommendations already mentioned

### *Recommendations*

- Offer a welcoming and equitable experience for all visitors from all backgrounds and experiences.
- Work to bring greater diversity of lived experience into the Board and Executive. That diversity will be achieved with thoughtful and more purposeful approaches to the wording of job advertisements and the processes of interviewee selection, interview type, and recruitment.
- Make specific moves to connect with communities and representative groups to establish a relationship. We will not make assumptions on behalf of communities in terms of what they need or want. Instead, where possible, we involve them in the discussion and planning. Our Outreach team will develop a dialogue with organisations that support or work with some of the new audiences we hope to engage with and encourage to participate. Our invitations will be explicit.
- Ask more specific questions of schools and other group bookings to anticipate any access requirements in advance to avoid disadvantaging anyone in the group.

“I would agree that it was accessibility really was the issue - to get there. And then we had to go with the film that was on, we really didn't have a choice if I'm to be honest. And the best films were in the evening. And of course, I don't go out in the evening, so, that was my experience.”

*Comment from a participant in our Community Feedback Workshop, December 2023*

## **Building audiences**

This will mark and make the change in our audiences – by increasing engagement and participation, growing numbers, and broadening diversity. We received incredibly valuable feedback from our focus group of disabled audience members who attended events during CIFF 2023 to test the accessibility accommodations that we had provided. Each gave generous and constructive feedback on their experiences, identifying ways to improve, and offering ideas for engaging their community for future events.

### *Recommendations*

- Inviting and welcoming feedback and suggestions from our stakeholders.
- Annually auditing and surveying audiences, artists, and team members to understand the identities, access needs, and any barriers to access, to support our measurement and evaluation processes.



## Implementing our EDI policy

It is our work now to consider how we can continuously inform ourselves of barriers to access, programme across our different strands in a way that feels welcoming, creates options and opportunity, and is relevant; produce communications and marketing messages that speak to audiences in a way that connects and radically informs; and identify spaces and partners for our events that previously marginalised people can access, but also, crucially, want to access.

Being purposeful about programming – times and venues, as well as the films themselves and their access features, because not every venue or time is accessible.

### Consider and engage potential collaborators

Partnership can be key to achieving success in inclusive audience development by opening up routes to target audience groups or to help plan projects to bring communities into contact with events, services, and opportunities previously not accessible to them, or not experienced before.

However, shared ambitions, understanding, and aims are key. We cannot tackle exclusion on our own; we need to ensure our partners have a shared understanding of the barriers to inclusion and a shared ambition to address them.

We can partner with DPOs (Disabled People's Organisations), community development organisations, government agencies, networks and resource organisations, or other cultural partners.

Social inclusion activities and partnerships can attract investment from non-arts funding sources, such as regeneration funds, social inclusion, community development, etc., which may bring new resources to the audience development work.

“Often when we hear that something is ‘for everyone’ - depending on your background or experience that often translates as ‘everyone but me’, ‘everyone but us’. Unless there is explicit engagement with that community and there is an explicit invitation and whether that is sessions like this, whether that is outreach and allocation of tickets, whether that is specific programmes in terms of ‘in conversations’ after the event, or whether it is programming that feels like it is reflective to that audience. But I also think it's about trust, the idea that building trust with communities isn't something that happens overnight but it's a continuous dialogue, so that people feel welcome and safe to participate.”

*Comment from a participant in our Community Feedback Workshop, December 2023*

## Measurement and evaluation

In tracking the success or otherwise of our work to implement our EDI strategy, the EDI Policy has built in an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) as part of the process.

An EIA comprises an evidence-based approach to ensure that our policies, practices, events, and decision-making processes are fair and do not create barriers or disadvantage any protected groups.

The EIA will help to ensure that:

- we understand the potential effects of the policy by assessing the impacts on different groups, both external and internal
- any adverse impacts are identified and actions identified to remove or mitigate them
- decisions are transparent and based on evidence with clear reasoning.

To complete the EIA, CIFF will follow the following steps:

1. **Understand the purpose** of an Equality Impact Assessment and carefully determine when an EIA is needed.  
An EIA is completed when a new policy or practice is being developed or when an existing one is being reviewed. The need depends on the potential impact of the policy and its relevance to equality. Benchmarks and targets may need to be established for growth or improvement, such as for tracking diversity in CIFF's programme (countries of production, gender balance / age / ethnicity / disability / membership of LGBTQIA+ for directors/producers/writers, etc.
2. **Assign responsibility.**  
The responsibility for completing and signing off the EIA varies depending on the nature of the policy, event, or activity. The CEO, Department Head, project lead, or relevant manager is responsible for determining if an EIA is required and making evaluation decisions.
3. **Gather evidence and make a judgement.**  
This evidence can be quantitative and/or qualitative. In cases where there is little evidence of the potential effect on protected characteristic groups, a judgement should be made based on the available information. Consultation with a diverse range of stakeholders can help strengthen these judgements and avoid biases or assumptions.
4. **Conduct consultation.**  
Consultation is important to demonstrate that equality duties are being met. It should be proportionate and relevant, considering the degree and range of consultation needed for each policy or activity.
5. **Conduct a provisional assessment.**  
If there is not enough evidence at the initial stages, a provisional assessment will be conducted. Plans can be made to gather the required data for a full assessment at a later time.
6. **Value differences.**  
EIAs involve comparing the needs and requirements of different groups to

identify any disproportionate differences. If a policy or practice has a disproportionate impact, it may have a detrimental effect on certain groups.

**7. Evaluate the impact.**

Based on the evidence and data gathered, evaluate the impact of the policy or activity on each protected characteristic group. There are four possible evaluation decisions:

1. no barriers identified (proceed)
2. stop the policy or practice due to bias
3. adapt or change the policy to eliminate bias, or
4. proceed with caution knowing that some groups may be favoured less than others.

**8. Monitor and review.**

Develop a plan for monitoring and reviewing the actual impact of the policy or activity. This may involve collecting qualitative research outcomes such as internal and external EDI surveys of staff, board, audience, filmmakers, principle stakeholders, alongside additional quantitative data such as from box office and other available data. Setting SMART goals ahead of the work will have been vital, clear on the objectives we have, such as on engaging community groupings.

**9. Document the EIA.**

Complete an EIA template, which should include information about the policy or activity being assessed, aims and objectives, consultation efforts, affected groups, potential impacts, and actions taken to address negative impacts. Include any explanations or justifications for the evaluation decisions made.

**10. Publish the EIA or share with appropriate stakeholders.**

## Recruiting focus group(s) with lived experience to test and give feedback

Ahead of the festival 2023, we recruited a focus group of five people from often excluded communities to road-test the festival experience, from searching the website, booking tickets online, and attending an in-person screening.

The focus group included representative(s) from the Disabled Community, including wheelchair and mobility aid users, people who experience chronic pain and so have limited energy levels, and both neurodivergent and neurotypical participants. Participants also represented intersectional identities ranging across age, LGBTQIA+, the Traveller Community, people for whom English is not their first language. and POC (People of Colour). Our participants' contributions, expertise, and time was honoured and valued, as would the contribution of any expert, via an honorarium.

We did not successfully recruit participants from the d/Deaf or Blind Communities. This indicates a specific work stream ahead to make our website more accessible, and the access accommodations provided within the screenings themselves, such as captioning, audio-describing and visual descriptions.

The group met online in the weeks after the Festival, thoughtfully facilitated by Sinéad Burke of Tilting the Lens, to give feedback on their experiences and

collectively identify ways to improve access in the future. We gained valuable experience in programming and managing accessible events by including two ISL interpreters within the range of accommodations that were provided for the workshop. Due to budget constraints a live captioner was not available.

We learned an enormous amount from the workshop outputs. We recognised that it wasn't just our physical and online spaces that we needed to consider for accessibility, but also our programmes, in terms of their relevance to multiply marginalised communities.