

Arts Council of Northern Ireland

Artificial Intelligence, Artists, the Arts Sector and Creative Practitioners: Position Statement

June 2026



Introduction and scope

- Artificial intelligence (AI), and in particular generative AI, has moved from a specialist technology into a tool of everyday use across the arts sector and the wider public sector. The Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI) needs a clear, consistent and durable yet flexible position on its expectations of funding applicants and how it makes decisions about adoption of AI.
- This position paper is informed by a survey of ACNI staff conducted in 2025, which identified current AI use, capability needs and concerns across the organisation. It reflects engagement with Arts Council England's emerging AI framework and learning from meetings with other arts councils exploring similar approaches. This work has been shaped by an AI working group established within ACNI and by online training delivered through the Centre for the Advancement of Science and Technology (CAST) on the landscape of AI options. In keeping with the spirit of this policy, this work has been assisted by Copilot to check for accuracy about the latest developments in AI, and revising spelling, grammar, syntax and logic.

Strategic context

- Investment in technology and digital infrastructure has been constrained at ACNI for an extended period, as our budget has dropped in real terms in the past 10 years. ACNI is not, and cannot afford to be, an early adopter of speculative technology. At the same time, AI features are already embedded in tools ACNI uses every day (for instance, Excel, Teams and Qualtrics). Similarly, the arts sector and the wider public sector are increasingly using AI tools, and ACNI has obligations of accountability and transparency that require a clear and consistent organisational position. This position paper reflects it.

Guiding principles

- Internally, ACNI supports the responsible use of AI where it clearly improves efficiency, accessibility or understanding. Appropriate uses include drafting and summarising content, analysing non-personal data, and supporting routine administrative tasks. AI is not used to make, or meaningfully shape, decisions that require human judgement, including the assessment of artistic merit, public benefit or funding outcomes. AI must not be used to process personal, confidential or sensitive information unless explicitly approved and compliant with data protection requirements. It is not used in HR, safeguarding or disciplinary matters. ACNI's approach is that AI supports work, but responsibility, judgement and accountability remain with people.
- The following six principles expand on this position. They will be applied by ACNI to every decision about the use, adoption or assessment of AI tools, features and systems. The Board and SMT will use them to navigate decisions on whether and how to deploy AI in any given function, including in the assessment of applications, the production of reports, and the linkage of funding and monitoring data.

- 1) Public benefit and proportionality: ACNI will adopt AI when it produces a demonstrable benefit to the public, the funded sector, or ACNI's own ability to deliver its statutory functions. Novelty, sector pressure and supplier interest are not sufficient grounds. The investment in any AI deployment (in money, in staff time, and in oversight) is proportionate to the benefit expected. Proportionality has an environmental dimension. AI systems consume significant energy and water. ACNI recognises these negative externalities and treats them as a relevant factor in any decision about AI adoption and use. Routine or trivial use of generative AI, where a simpler tool, or no tool, would suffice, is inconsistent with this principle, even where the direct cost to the user/ACNI appears negligible. ACNI's choices in this area sit within its wider obligations as a public body under the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 and its commitments to environmental responsibility.
- 2) Human accountability for judgement: AI may support, but does not replace, the human judgement for which ACNI is publicly accountable. A named officer is responsible for any output, recommendation or decision informed by AI. ACNI engages in a large number of operational and administrative tasks. AI may be used to support these activities. ACNI recognises that these activities, may affect the rights, livelihoods and treatment of artists, arts organisations and the audiences and participants they serve. As a result, staff and the Board remain accountable for all the steps in the funding process (from guidance notes to final approval by the Board) even if AI is used. This implies that tasks that are mechanical and verifiable may be supported by AI; judgements about artistic merit, public benefit and equality are not and remain human.
- 3) Transparency and Inclusion: ACNI is open with its staff, applicants, partners and the public about where and how it uses AI. Where AI has materially shaped a published output, a public-facing process, or the handling of a person's application, ACNI will say so in writing. ACNI publishes its approved tools list and reports annually on its AI use to the Board and to the public. Similarly, every AI deployment is screened against ACNI's duties under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and the Public Sector Equality Duty before adoption. ACNI is alert to the well-evidenced risks that AI systems can encode and amplify disadvantage on grounds including disability, ethnicity, age, gender and socio-economic position.
- 4) Data protection and security: All AI use complies with the UK GDPR, the Data Protection Act 2018, and ACNI's Information and IT Security Policy. The Arts Council of Northern Ireland processes the minimum personal and sensitive data necessary, and applies the same data handling standards to AI tools as to any other system. The existing requirement that AI software is vetted and cleared by the IT Officer for compliance with ACNI policy and legal obligations is retained and reinforced by this policy.
- 5) Mindful of impact on creativity: As a publicly funded body whose purpose includes supporting the arts and creative livelihoods in Northern Ireland, ACNI is mindful of the impact of AI tools on artists, freelancers and cultural workers. ACNI considers the wider sectoral implications of its adoption choices, and prefers tools whose terms of use and underlying training are compatible with the rights and interests of creative workers.

- 6) Capability before scale: ACNI invests in staff understanding and training before deploying AI at scale. Adoption follows capability, not the other way round. ACNI does not roll out AI tools to staff who have not had the opportunity to develop the skills and confidence to use them safely.

Position statement on AI, artists, the arts sector and creative practitioners in general

- Our view on the use of AI by arts organisations, artists and creative practitioners in general are set out below:
 1. We accept applications prepared with the use of AI: Applicants may use generative AI tools in the preparation of their applications. ACNI does not treat AI use as a disqualifying factor. AI tools can be of particular value to applicants who have less experience of formal application writing, applicants with disabilities, applicants writing in a language other than their first language, and applicants without organisational support. Treating AI use as a disqualifying factor would create new inequalities.
 2. Applicants are responsible for the integrity of their application: Whether or not AI is used, applicants are responsible for the accuracy and integrity of every statement in their application. ACNI expects applicants to provide an honest account of their plans, capability and circumstances. Misrepresentation, whether AI-assisted or not, is grounds for refusal of an application or for recovery of an award. Applicants are also responsible for ensuring that any use of AI does not infringe the rights of third parties, including in the underlying data on which an AI tool has been trained.
 3. We treat use of AI in funded creative work as something to be open about: Where applicants intend to use AI in the creative work itself, ACNI asks them to describe this in the application. The principal creative authorship of funded work is expected to remain human. AI may be used as a tool within the creative process (for ideation, drafting, technical production, accessibility, translation and similar purposes) and ACNI's interest is in transparency about this rather than in restricting it. Use of AI tools to support accessibility (for example, voice-to-text and text-to-voice tools used by d/Deaf, disabled or neurodivergent artists) does not require disclosure as a use of AI within the work.