



Code of Care

Working with
Individuals Traditionally
Underrepresented in
Literature and
Publishing

Introduction

This Code of Care intends to create the conditions for writers, editors and those working in publishing from diverse communities to participate and contribute equally at all levels in the literature and publishing sectors in Ireland.

The Arts Council of Ireland's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy is built on the 'foundation that everyone in Ireland has an equal right to engage with and participate in the arts, regardless of age, civil or family status, disability, gender, membership of the Traveller community, race, religion, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status.' However, multiple structural barriers exist that prevent writers, editors and publishers from backgrounds traditionally underrepresented in literature and publishing from exercising this right and from telling their varied stories or publishing stories that resonate in ways that uphold and respect their culture, dignity, and identities. These barriers include lack of and under-delivery of accommodation and housing, racism and discrimination and low incomes, to name but a few.

Artistic and cultural organisations and networks often act as leaders for progressive social change. By challenging injustice and championing authentic inclusion, representation and actualising human rights, these organisations lead by example and use their platform to inspire. As facilitators of the creation, production and dissemination of culture, not only do we have a duty to ensure that Irish culture in all its richness is fully reflected in the writers we work with and the literature and media that we produce, but it also provides an exciting opportunity to source new perspectives and enrich and expand our culture. To achieve this, we must adopt practices that enable the full participation of writers, editors and arts workers from all communities.

This code offers a guide to commitments and practices that can be proactively adopted when working with writers and storytellers. It further suggests and recommends ways in which literary organisations and publishing houses can be more welcoming of writers, editors and publishers from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds, provide appropriate resources to support engagement and publish a diverse range of stories reflecting the richness of the culture we share.

Explanatory Note

In July 2023, Skein Press, Holy Show, and Publishing Ireland agreed to explore the development and adoption of a Code of Care. The purpose of this code is to create the conditions for writers, editors, and publishers from communities that are traditionally underrepresented to participate and contribute equally at all levels in the literature and publishing sectors in Ireland. This work is informed by training delivered by the Cork Traveller Culture Awareness Training Initiative, discussions held with writers and activists concerned with creating a more inclusive sector and learning from the ongoing work in this area.

Statement of Intent

This Code of Care sets out equitable and ethical standards for the literary and publishing sector. It covers good practice approaches to working relationships, standards of access and inclusion, engagement with individuals and communities, and organisational change. The Code provides a blueprint that can deliver a more collaborative, equitable, creative, and inclusive literary and publishing sector for writers, editors and publishers who have traditionally been underrepresented and could be applied to writers from all backgrounds and communities, as well as the wider arts sector. It also serves as an advocacy tool to support the basis of policy and legislative change for the long-term benefit of the literary and publishing sector.

Cultural Care

Cultural care is essential to creating a safe working environment for writers, editors and publishers from diverse backgrounds and is an important practice in advocating for equity. Cultural care means ensuring an environment that recognises and respects the cultural identities of people, and creates a nurturing place that is socially, emotionally, and physically safe for people to be who they are. This can be achieved in the following ways:

- Proactively building diverse teams in workplaces who are authentic decision-makers/change-makers.
- Ensuring decision-making about cultural communities is made with members of the affected community in a supported manner, which is often summed up by the maxim ‘nothing about us without us’.
- Ensuring that workplace politics and protocols are anti-discriminatory while recognising the overlapping and intersecting forms of discrimination that some individuals may face due to their race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, gender identity, ability, class and other critical forms of identity.
- Addressing staff cultural competency through to management and board levels and supporting staff in attending regular and relevant cultural training to prevent the production and reproduction of cultural appropriation.
- Listening to community voices and following processes of communication and consultation.

Community Engagement

Organisations and staff need to understand the cultural, social and political context of writers' work through the processes of research, consultation, and open communication. This needs to be underpinned by the recognition that underrepresented creatives can and should be included across the entire programme, not solely through works that are about cultural identity or are overtly political. Also, understanding the community concerns of the writer is important to ensure their needs and their cultural context are upheld. Upholding the human rights and dignity of writers from diverse backgrounds underpinned by these understandings will require:

- Educating ourselves on the evolving needs and experiences of the communities we are engaging with. For example, we should seek to understand the context and culture from the writer's perspective and this should be the bedrock from which meaningful and appropriate collaboration evolves.
- Maintaining open channels of communication and feedback between writers and editors, publishers and staff within literary and publishing organisations.
- Being open and responsive to the writer's needs as every writer's needs will be different. For example, assess a writer's specific needs at the beginning and provide the necessary support.
- Authentically consulting with writers on the production, marketing and publicity of their creative content to ensure the writer feels their work or story is not exploited or misrepresented. Including communities of interest to the writers in building the audiences for the book.
- Remunerating writers adequately for their time and expertise; if people are tasked with additional labour to address anti-racism or other matters related to equity, honour this work with an additional fee separate from their base salary/fee.

- Allowing for long lead times and resources to support writers; not asking for participation at the last minute or only in response to specific socio-cultural campaigns/geopolitical crises etc.
- Committing to long-term supportive relationships with writers and their communities, rather than one-off 'box-ticking' events. For example, supporting the writers on issues of concern to the community, supporting community events of importance to the writers, conducting outreach to the writers' community to build audience participation, relationships, and support to emerging writers.

Organisational Change

Implementing this code will require organisations to deliver organisational changes informed by the principles of equity. Action across all areas of operations, including governance, programming and commissioning, recruitment and staff development, audience development and marketing, organisational culture and creative collaboration will be needed, including:

- Strong representation of writers, editors and publishers traditionally and historically underrepresented across all levels of the organisation.
- Investing in and creating opportunities for their leadership, and putting in place succession planning through career pathways, mentorship and job opportunities.
- Implementing equitable application and selection processes by ensuring that evaluation committees and assessment panels include people with diverse practices, identities and lived experiences.
- Hiring diversely across all levels of the organisation, not just entry-level or cultural liaison roles, but senior management and board positions.
- Ensuring fees and salaries are in line with recommended figures and at or above minimum wage for the role; consider publishing a pay transparency policy.

