

A quick guide to

Changing the story on arts, culture, and creativity in Aotearoa



**Creative New Zealand
Toi Aotearoa is committed to
empowering the arts, culture,
and creative sector with tools to
strengthen our collective voice.**

**This guide is one of those tools. It provides
a framework and an approach to advocacy
to build toward long-term change.**

This guide offers evidence-based insights into the most effective ways to talk about the changes we want to see and traps to avoid. It's designed to be used collectively — to strengthen, complement, and support the important work many in the sector are already doing.

The guide has been researched and written by narrative change strategists, The Workshop. We thank The Workshop team for sharing their expertise, listening to the unique needs of our community, and providing a framework to help make our voices heard.

Importantly, this guide has been developed with significant input from our sector including The Arts Foundation Te Tumu Toi, Te Taumata Toi-a-Iwi, Toi o Taraika Arts Wellington, and deep dives with Māori and Pacific knowledge holders.

Creative New Zealand Toi Aotearoa and Te Rōpū Mana Toi, 2022

This advice summarises how to talk about the arts, culture, and creative sector in a way that helps people understand and support what's needed for the sector to thrive

Use this advice to guide your specific communications, and read the longer guide for more explanations and examples.

[Read the full narrative guide](#) on the Creative New Zealand Toi Aotearoa website.

The examples here show different aspects of the advice in action — no example can do everything perfectly. Every piece of advocacy has its own nuances, audiences, cultures, history, and objectives.

How to deepen understanding and build support for change

Use the advice in this document to scaffold your own communications for your needs. When we all use a similar framework and narratives, stories come together over time, and something bigger happens.

Focus your communication on people who are open to persuasion

When you're planning your communication or reacting on the spot, think about three main groups of people.

- People who don't have a fixed view, or who have mixed or competing views — your persuadables
- People who are already persuaded — your base of supporters, who can share your messages
- People who are opposed to changes and unlikely to be persuaded

Your communication should focus on meeting the information and communication needs of people whose mindsets and opinions are open to persuasion, and also motivate your base.

Use the advice in this guide widely and you will reach persuadable people.

Most people are open to persuasion and they are in every demographic. This group also includes people who can and do express opposing views — they might be currently influenced by dominant unhelpful narratives, but still be persuadable when you use new narratives.



Practical recommendations for communicating about the arts, culture and creative sector

Here's how to deepen understanding and build support for a flourishing and accessible arts, culture, and creative sector. The rest of this quick guide expands on each recommendation.

- 1** Replace unhelpful narratives with helpful narratives
- 2** Use a vision + explanation + solution formula
- 3** Tap into what people value
- 4** Explain the connection between the arts, culture, and creativity that people value and what's needed to support artists and the sector
- 5** Emphasise strengths rather than struggles
- 6** Continue to tell compelling stories about ngā toi Māori
- 7** Use the expertise of communities to shift mindsets and narratives together
- 8** Focus on artists as people and the systems that support them
- 9** Use compelling language
- 10** Choose messengers or storytellers your audience trusts

Replace unhelpful narratives with helpful narratives



Narratives are like a golden thread in our stories that reflect shared ways of thinking and reasoning — shared mindsets

Narratives are patterns of meaning and common understanding in our talk and communication.

Stories are all the different ways we talk and communicate day-to-day about arts, culture, and creativity, for example a news item, a press release, or a campaign with people talking.

Stories can be unique to the needs of different groups, have a different focus, and a different call to action. And stories don't all have to sound or feel the same, but they should all reflect the same helpful narratives.

Always use your own narratives instead of repeating or arguing against unhelpful narratives.

For example, use your narratives to show and explain the public good that arts, culture, and creativity does, the support the sector needs, and the powerful role that artists have in our lives.

Reflect these helpful narratives in your stories

Arts, culture and creativity is a public good that benefits us all.

Arts, culture, and creativity is vital infrastructure for healthy, vibrant people, and communities. Like other community infrastructure such as transport and schools, the arts, culture, and creative sector needs the same support.

Artists are leaders, innovators, and storytellers and have a profound effect on who we are as people in society.

Investment in arts, culture, and creativity is an investment in people and in community wellbeing.

See page 14 of the full guide for more helpful narratives, as well as narratives to reduce, replace or avoid.

Use a vision + explanation + solution formula

Give people a clear vision, an explanation of the barriers standing in the way, and lay out the solutions to realising the vision. Using this formula gives people hope that change is achievable and shows what needs to happen.



A vision + explanation + solution example about sustainable career pathways for artists

Here's an example about sustainable career pathways for artists, but you can use this formula for any of your specific communication needs and contexts.



Lead with a vision and tap into values

Most of us know that artists, and the music, books, dance, theatre, photographs, and other art forms they create, enable us to thrive as people and communities.



Explain barriers, including cause and flow-on effects

But for a long time, people in power have not recognised how central arts, culture, and creativity are to our well-being. So they've failed to put in place the right policies and infrastructure to resource it. This neglect has undervalued the sector, leading to low pay, inequitable access, and limited job continuity. Too many artists today do not have viable, sustainable careers. The median income for creative professionals, including non-creative income, is \$35,800.



Give a solution, and link back to vision and values

People in government need to work together to put artists and creativity at the centre of efforts to improve our shared well-being. A key part of this effort is to create a system of equitable support to sustain artists' careers.



With your solution, tell people what they can do to help, and link back to your vision and values

A basic income for people working in arts, culture, and creativity is one example of that support. Resale royalties for artists is another. Programmes like this have existed in the past and people in government can take the best from what has worked and create the right system for artists today. All of us can help create this future by letting our politicians know that we'd support them in making changes to support artists. When artists get the right support, more of us can be healthy, connected, and thriving.

See page 22 of the full guide for more on clear explanations.

Values are ‘the why’ of our actions and lives

We all have many values, but we prioritise them differently. The way we word our communication can bring the most helpful values, like equity, care, and connection to the surface. Use phrases like, ‘we all’, ‘together’, ‘most people care...’, ‘when everyone can...’, ‘art fills us all with...’.

Values that help the case for changes that will make the biggest difference

accessibility

universalism

creativity

connection

broadmindedness

inner harmony

being part of nature

care

equity — everyone getting what they need

peace

innovation and self-direction

social and environmental justice

An example using the value of connectedness

“For me, storytelling exists to remind us that we are not alone.”



Shane Boshier

Allyson, who has cerebral palsy, is particularly interested in portraiture and figure drawing. She also likes to experiment with different artforms, including writing and composing her own music.

An example using the value of equity



Allyson Hamblett, an artist at Spark Centre of Creative Development in Auckland, is fascinated with the stories of the people she paints. Changing attitudes about disability is something Allyson aims to do with her artwork.

“Society holds many preconceptions about disability, based on fear of the unknown. I like challenging these misconceptions”.



See page 26 of the full guide for more examples showing helpful values.

Explain the connection between the arts, culture, and creativity that people value and what's needed to support artists and the sector



Name what's needed to support artists and the sector whenever you talk about the value of arts, culture, and creativity — it's not easy for people to see what causes under-resourcing and what changes are needed for the sector to flourish

If we don't fill the gap between what people value and what changes are needed, people use their own quick-thinking explanations like:

Individualism: individual artists need to solve their own problems, and if they fail, it's because they made the wrong choice, didn't have enough talent, or didn't make enough effort

Consumerism: the best thing I can do to support art is to spend my own money on art

Marketism: the market will identify and fund the best art.

Show people that putting the right systems and structures in place will have collective benefits for the whole sector. Using your own helpful narratives can help you do this.

Use 'art as a public good' framing to talk about how arts, culture, and creativity builds health and wellbeing, but to do that, relies on the right support.

Examples explaining the connection between what's valued and what's needed:

Arts, culture, and creativity are essential infrastructure for healthy, vibrant communities where people want to live, work, and raise their families. And like other community infrastructure such as transport, schools, and hospitals, the sector needs the right policies and resources.

Stella's story: Below is a snippet from "Stella's story", created by Creative Rights = Creative Reads. Illustrated by Ezra Whittaker, written by Toby Morris¹





See page 32 of the full guide for more on explaining the connection between what's valued and what's needed.

Emphasise strengths rather than struggles



Highlight the strengths and assets of creative people, communities, and the sector

It's understandable to want to start with problems and struggles, but doing this can make people open to persuasion feel hopeless and won't persuade them to support the changes needed for artists to thrive.

"By definition artists are innovators and lateral thinkers. They see ideas and solutions where others may not. They are masters at problem solving as this is a core part of their creative work."



Waikato Arts Navigator²

When you do need to talk about problems, talk about them with a clear explanation that starts with a vision and values, and clearly lays out the origin and consequences of the problem, and what the solutions are. You can still talk about the amazing strengths of people in spite of these problems.

See page 34 of the full guide for more on leading with strengths.

Continue to tell stories
about ngā toi Māori



Telling our own stories

Telling stories as tangata whenua of Aotearoa is vital. Māori communities and artists have powerful stories to share about the impact arts, culture, and creativity has on hauora and identity, and on whānau and community connectedness with each other and the environment.

Māori artists already uphold and communicate the mana of ancestral knowledge. Keep telling these stories to motivate people to act.

“Mahi toi is rongoā, it’s my salve and my salvation, it resonates through all aspects of my life and can’t be separated from who I am.”



Bonita Bigham, artist and chair, Te Maruata Roopu Whakahere, LGNZ³

“Evidence needs compelling stories. Compelling stories need new language that moves people to act.”



Linda Tuhiwai Smith CNZM, Distinguished Professor, Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi⁴

Part of strengths-and-vision-led narratives is supporting advocates to also communicate the barriers and pathways to realising their vision for communities. The challenge is to explain rather than describe barriers and show clear pathways to solutions.

To support Māori communities in sharing their own stories about art, culture, and creativity, we recommend co-developing communications and advocacy campaigns and approaches with a clear directive from communities and creatives.

See page 40 of the full guide for more ngā toi Māori advocacy reflections and more on barriers and solutions.

Use the expertise of communities to shift mindsets and narratives together



If you're working to make arts, culture, and creativity more accessible, relevant, and valued for your culture or community, you'll already know many of the unhelpful, dominant narratives and mindsets that exist

Use this knowledge and people in your community to lead the work to create more helpful, deeper explanations and narratives.

Together, you'll have specific barriers and solutions you can use in your explanations and unique visions for what people's lives could be like if those visions were realised. The shared values and strengths of people in your community will also be specific.

Every piece of advocacy has its own nuances, audiences, cultures, history and objectives. The stories from Pacific, Asian, Deaf and disabled people, LGBTQIA+ people, and other communities will be different, but the strategy of keeping to your narrative, leading with a vision and values, focusing on strengths, and giving clear explanations is the same.

When everyone uses their unique instruments to play the same tune, over time, powerful music is possible.

See page 44 of the full guide for more on working together with your communities.

Focus on artists as people and the systems that support them



Help people understand that artists need the right systems and support to thrive

Make artists visible and show the systems that enable them to create their work.

We can start by talking more about artists' strengths as storytellers, innovators, agitators and leaders, and the conditions they need, rather than the 'products' they create.

An example focusing on artists as well as art:

} **A love and appreciation of books goes hand in hand with a love and appreciation of the creators and authors who wrote them.**

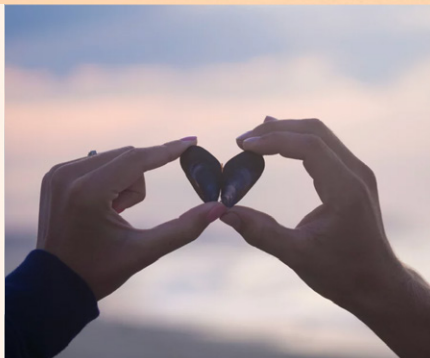


Copyright Licensing New Zealand⁵

Supporting NZ and the creative industry

Good New Zealand books and their authors are close to our heart and we're out to declare our unreserved love.

The message is simple - a love and appreciation of books goes hand in hand with a love and appreciation of the creators and authors who wrote them. We are sure that teachers, students, and other reading New Zealanders, will agree.



See page 46 of the full guide for more on focusing on artists.

Use compelling language

Use terms like 'arts, culture, and creativity' to widen how people think of the sector and invite everyone in. Research shows that talking about 'the arts' or 'arts and culture' brings to mind a more limited and elite understanding of arts, culture, and creativity.⁶



Use metaphors to help explain complex ideas

Metaphors bring ideas to life, help explain complex things, and help people remember. A metaphor takes something we understand on a practical everyday level, like the weather or machines, and connects it to something more abstract or complex. This connection gives people a deeper explanation for complex issues.

Testing metaphors with audiences who are open to persuasion will help show which are the most effective at helping people see the big changes the sector needs to flourish. Here are some suggestions to test.



Ecosystem

Arts, culture, and creativity is an ecosystem that we're all part of



Music

Arts, culture, and creativity is the music of the soul



Light

Arts, culture, and creativity illuminates and lights the creative spark within us



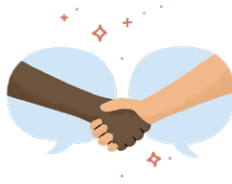
Magic and transformation

Artists are a transforming prism – they take in light and refract colours and possibilities

Arts, culture, and creativity is a window to possibilities and dreams

Arts, culture, and creativity is a portal to other worlds

Arts, culture, and creativity is magic



Connection

Arts, culture, and creativity is a glue that connects us

Arts, culture, and creativity connects us to each other, to our own creativity, and to our environment

Arts, culture, and creativity is part of our wholeness as humans



Korowai

Arts, culture, and creativity is a korowai that protects us⁷

Our well-being is a beautiful woven cloak — the horizontal threads are arts, culture, and creativity, and the vertical threads are all other elements of society

When arts, culture, and creativity touch all things, the result is strong, beautiful, warm, and comforting



Foundation

Arts, culture, and creativity anchors us

Arts, culture, and creativity is at the foundation of our world

Arts, culture, and creativity is the core, or the beating heart of the creative industries

The impact of arts, culture, and creativity is like a stone dropped in a pond – the far-reaching ripples are the impact that spreads from the creative catalyst



Nature, gardening, or growth

Arts, culture, and creativity is a garden filled with many different plants, providing nourishment and beauty

Arts, culture, and creativity helps to grow healthy tamariki

Arts, culture, and creativity is like the sun and rain that create a thriving society

Arts, culture, and creativity is a braided river – with many streams intersecting and flowing in a positive direction



Journey

Arts, culture, and creativity is a rudder steering us to a new future

We're on a creative journey

Artists are our navigators

Arts, culture, and creativity is a navigation of self, place, and purpose

Arts, culture, and creativity gives us a map for our collective future

See page 50 of the full guide for more on using compelling language.

Use messengers or storytellers your audience trusts



The messengers who give us information matter

A good messenger will do the heavy lifting of an effective story and helpful narrative because trust and credibility in the messenger is a mental shortcut people use to assess whether information is believable.

We tend to trust people who are more like us, who we think share our values, who we have had positive experiences with, who share our background or experience, and who we believe are qualified to comment.

And because many different types of people are open to persuasion, choose messengers people already trust and use a wide range of messengers.

- Messengers with shared values
- Messengers who are well qualified to comment on the context of the message
- Intergenerational messengers
- Surprising messengers — for example, farmers talking about the health benefits of arts, culture, and creativity

See page 56 of the full guide for more on messengers.

A summary of the research

Our researchers interviewed knowledge holders and expert advocates, reviewed relevant research literature, and analysed the narratives currently used by advocates and opponents. Here's a summary of what researchers found.

People value creativity, but they don't see the systems and structures needed to support it

The research showed that many people value art, culture, and creativity, and see its contribution to wellbeing⁸, but centering communication on wellbeing alone isn't enough to influence funding, policy, or infrastructure decisions.

Most people don't understand the structural and systemic barriers and solutions needed to support artists and the art sector.

Opponents focus on money and spending

Unhelpful thinking from opponents focuses on government spending and consumer tax payers. For example, if money is going to arts, culture, and creativity, it's not going to hospitals. This thinking plays into an 'us versus them' and 'separate' narrative that shuts down deeper, more nuanced thinking about arts, culture, and creativity and collective wellbeing.

Art is also seen as a luxury, a 'nice to have', or it is not productive, or is elitist.⁹ These unhelpful narratives activate a consumer mindset. This thinking also stops people from understanding the role of government and legislation in supporting arts, culture, and creativity.

What this means

Understanding current narratives helps us reframe conversations to build support for changes we need. Communication should not repeat or get caught up in trying to argue against these unhelpful narratives.

Putting it all together — big picture planning

Use these questions and the checklist on the next page to help plan your advocacy communications. Remember to clarify your vision and solution first. This will help you plan your own writing and will help you explain things more clearly to your audiences.

For example, you might be trying to persuade a council to fund a ngā toi Māori festival, or you're trying to increase the numbers of Pacific students enrolling in arts, culture, or creative education.

Use these questions to help you at the start

What is the purpose of your communication and what outcome do you want?

What do you want your audience to understand?

What mindsets do you want to activate? What do they sound like?

What do you want your audience to do?

What mindsets do you want to avoid? What do they sound like?

Who is your base of supporters?

Who is your persuadable audience?

Who are your messengers, and through what channels?

A communication checklist

Check your communication:

- Talks mainly to your persuadable audience
- Tells your own story
- Uses a vision + explanation + solution formula
- Taps into intrinsic (all-of-us) values like care, connection, contribution, or equity
- Uses a clear explanation about the barriers to your vision — what is the barrier, how did it get there, what are the flow-on effects, who created it, and names who can remove the barriers and what they need to do
- Uses helpful metaphors and frames, such as 'for the public good' and 'part of our ecosystem'
- Uses concrete, specific language
- Finishes by reminding people of your why

Check your communication does not:

- Talk just to your base of supporters
- Talk to entrenched opponents
- Negate or myth-bust opponents' stories
- Use unhelpful narratives or frames that trigger thinking about individualism, fatalism, marketism, or us versus them
- Tap into extrinsic (external) values such as money, fear, safety, and power
- Use a lot of facts to describe a problem rather than using facts as part of an explanation
- Use abstract or vague language

Get in touch, or join our community of practice

This work will have the greatest impact if we do it together, consistently. We invite you to join us — we are stronger together. We also invite you, as readers, to get in touch if you have feedback or suggestions on the information in this guide.

Contact us at advocacy@creativenz.govt.nz

Thank you

Thank you to Creative New Zealand staff, sector advisory group Te Rōpū Mana Toi (Dolina Wehipeihana, Elise Sterback, Gretchen La Roche, Dr. Jeremy Mayall, Karl Chitham, Kim Morton, Megan Peacock-Coyle, Fonoti Pati Umaga, Rosabel Tan, Tānemahuta Gray), Tanea Heke, Dr. Lana Lopesi, The Arts Foundation Te Tumu Toi, Te Taumata Toi-a-Iwi, Toi o Taraika Arts Wellington, other knowledge holders, user testers, and everyone else who has helped shape and review this guide.

Endnotes

1. Ezra Whittaker and Toby Morris, *Stella's Story*, Creative Rights = Creative Reads <https://www.creativerights.nz/stellas-story>
2. Waikato Arts Navigator Regional Strategy, 2021 https://creativewaikato.co.nz/site/uploads/Waikato-Arts-Navigator-Regional-Strategy_ONLINE.pdf
3. Bonita Bigham, Artist and Chair, Te Maruata Roopu Whakahere <https://vimeo.com/478798390?embedded=true&source=vimeo-logo&owner=99963652>
4. Max Rashbrooke's Inequality: *A New Zealand Crisis*, 2018
5. Copyright Licensing New Zealand, Supporting NZ and the creative industry <https://www.copyright.co.nz/authors-and-publishers/supporting-the-creative-industry>
6. Creating Connection, Arts Midwest, and Metropolitan Group, 'Research Summary'; National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, 'Arts and Creativity Strengthen Our Nation: A Narrative and Message Guide,' 2021 https://nasaa-arts.org/nasaa_advocacy/messaging/
7. This example was provided by a Māori knowledge holder and reviewers recommended that non-Māori should exercise care and consideration of cultural contexts when selecting metaphors to use in their communications.
8. Morris, Hargreaves, McIntyre, "Audience Atlas Aotearoa 2020," 2020 <https://creativenz.govt.nz/Development-and-resources/Research-and-reports/Audience-Atlas-Aotearoa-2020>
Creating Connection, Arts Midwest, and Metropolitan Group, "Research Summary," 2019 <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/56e347ee0442621615c31e5e/t/5c36131721c67c965a14c0a6/1547047704986/Research+Summary+2019.pdf>
A New Approach, "A View from Middle Australia: Perceptions of Arts, Culture and Creativity," 2020 <https://newapproach.org.au/insight-reports/a-view-from-middle-australia-perceptions-of-arts-culture-and-creativity/>
9. [Creating Connection, Arts Midwest, and Metropolitan Group, "Creating Connection Message Framework," 2018.](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/56e347ee0442621615c31e5e/t/5c36176f8a922dd24de2553/1547048815765/Creating-Connection-Message-Framework_2018.pdf) [https://static1.squarespace.com/static/56e347ee0442621615c31e5e/t/5c36176f8a922dd24de2553/1547048815765/Creating-Connection-Message-Framework_2018.pdf.](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/56e347ee0442621615c31e5e/t/5c36176f8a922dd24de2553/1547048815765/Creating-Connection-Message-Framework_2018.pdf)

Research by:
Jordan Green [The Workshop](#)

Written by:
Jayne Dalmer, Hannah Patterson,
Jordan Green and Marianne Elliott
(The Workshop), with contributions from
Creative New Zealand Toi Aotearoa

Design, layout, and illustrations:
[Daylight](#)

[Read more about advocacy at
Creative New Zealand on their website](#)

This content is published by The Workshop under a Creative
Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike licence.